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THE MOST THRILLING

SCIENCE FICTION

EVER TOLD

No. 6
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Earth was dying. Possibly the only human beings left in the Universe were those on the Moon. On this last outpost of humanity, the age-old controversy between ideologies continued to tear the human race apart, as each group prepared to unleash the deadly . . .

Tongues of the Moon

By PHILIP JOSE FARMER

FIREFLIES on the dark meadow of Earth . . .

The men and women looking up through the dome in the center of the crater of Eratosthenes were too stunned to cry out, and

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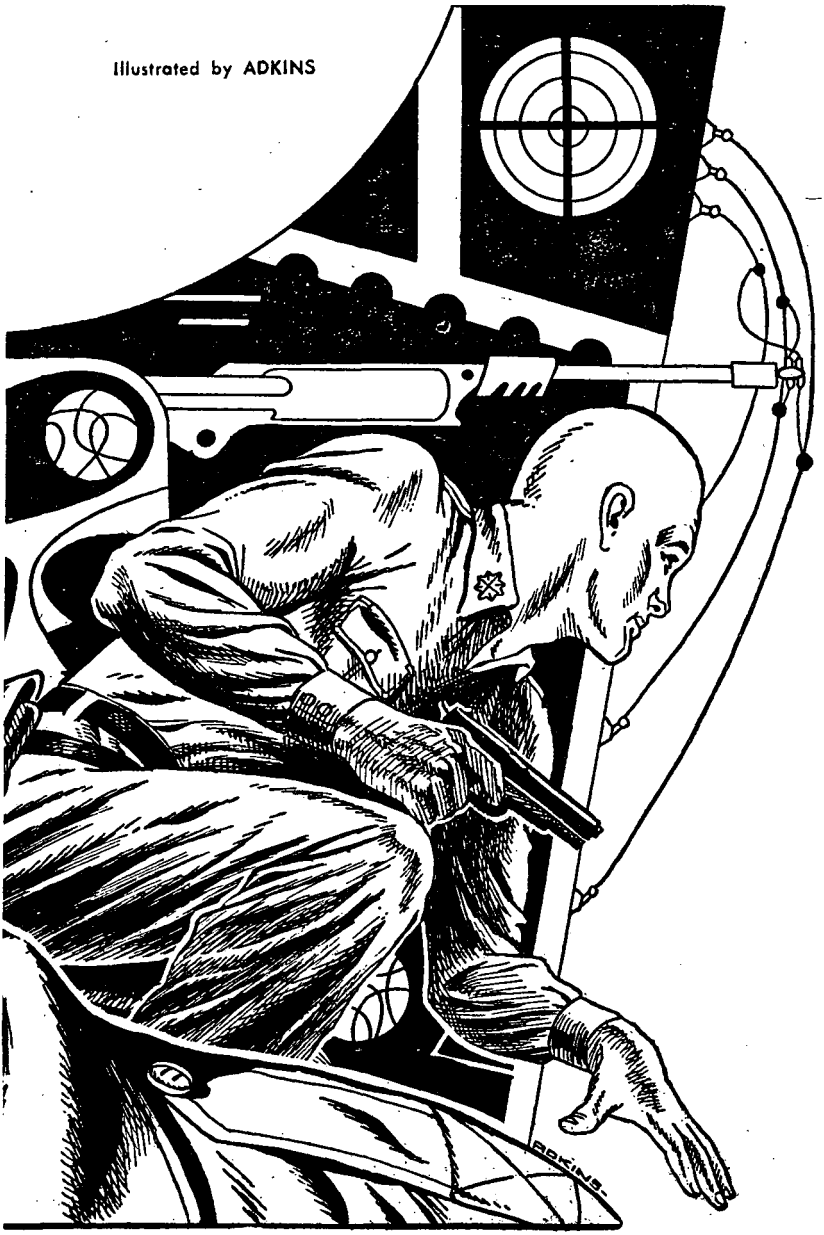
Illustrated by ADKINS



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some did not understand all at once the meaning of those pinpoints on the shadowy face of the new Earth, the lights blossoming outwards, then dying. So bright they could be seen through the cloudmasses covering a large part of Europe. So bright they could be located as London, Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen, Leningrad, Rome, Reykjavik, Athens, Cairo . . .

Then, a flare near Moscow that spread out and out and out . . .

Some in the dome recovered more quickly than others. Scone and Broward, two of the Soviet North American officers present at the reception in honor of the South Atlantic Axis officers, acted swiftly enough to defend themselves.

Even as the Axes took off their caps and pulled small automatics and flat bombs from clips within the caps, the two Americans reached for the guns in their holsters.

Too late to do them much good if the Argentineans and South Africans nearest them had aimed at them. The Axes had no shock on their faces; they must have known what to expect. And their weapons were firing before the fastest of the Soviets could reach for the butts of their guns.

But the Axes must have had orders to kill the highest ranking Soviets first. At these the first fire was concentrated.

Marshal Kosselevsky had half-turned to his guest, Marshal Ramírez-Armstrong. His mouth was open and working, but no words came from it. Then, his eyes opened even wider as he saw the stubby gun in the Argentinean's hand. His own hand rose in a defensive, wholly futile, gesture.

Ramírez-Armstrong's gun twanged three times. Other Axes' bullets also struck the Russian. Kosselevsky clutched at his paunch, and he fell face forward. The .22 calibers did not have much energy or penetrate deeply into the flesh. But they exploded on impact; they did their work well enough.

Scone and Broward took advantage of not being immediate targets. Guns in hand, they dived for the protection of a man-tall bank of instruments. Bullets struck the metal cases and exploded, for, in a few seconds, the Axes had accomplished their primary mission and were now out to complete their secondary.

Broward felt a sting on his cheek as he rolled behind the bank. He put his hand on his cheek, and, when he took it away, he saw his hand covered with blood. But his probing finger felt only a shallow of flesh. He forget about the wound. Even if it had been more serious, he would have had no time to take care of it.

A South African stepped

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around the corner of the bank, firing as he came.

Broward shot twice with his .45. The dark-brown face showered into red and lost its human shape. The body to which it was now loosely attached curved backwards and fell on the floor.

"BROWARD!" called Scone above the twang and boom of the guns and the wharoop! of a bomb. "Can you see anything? I can't even stick my head around the corner without being shot at."

Broward looked at Scone, who was crouched at the other end of the bank. Scone's back was to Broward, but Scone's head was twisted far enough for him to see Broward out of the corner of his eye.

Even at that moment, when Broward's thoughts should have excluded everything but the fight, he could not help comparing Scone's profile to a face cut out of rock. The high bulbous forehead, thick bars of bone over the eyes, Dantesque nose, thin lips, and chin jutting out like a shelf of granite, more like a natural formation which happened to resemble a chin than anything which had taken shape in a human womb.

Ugly, massive, but strong. Nothing of panic or fear in that face; it was as steady as his voice.

Old Gibraltar-face, thought Broward for perhaps the hundredth time. But this time he did not feel dislike.

"I can't see any more than you —Colonel," he said.

Scone, still squatting, shifted around until he could bring one eye to bear fully on Broward. It was a pale blue, so pale it looked empty, unhuman.

"Colonel?"

"Now," said Broward. "A bomb got General Mansfield and Colonels Omato and Ingrass. That gives you a fast promotion, sir."

"We'll both be promoted above this bank if an Axe lobs a bomb over," said Scone. "We have to get out of here."

"To where?"

Scone frowned—granite wrinkling—and said, "It's obvious the Axes want to do more than murder a few Soviets. They must plan on getting control of the bonephones. I know I would if I were they. If they can capture the control center, every Soviet on the Moon—except for the Chinese—is at their mercy. So . . ."

"We make a run for the BR?"

"I'm not ordering you to come with me," said Scone. "That's almost suicide. But you will give me a covering fire."

"I'll go with you, Colonel."

Scone glanced at the caduceuses on Broward's lapels, and he said, "We'll need your profession-

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al help after we clean out the Axes. No."

"You need my amateurish help now," said Broward. "As you see"—he jerked his thumb at the nearly headless Zulu— "I can handle a gun. And if we don't get to the bonephone controls first, life won't be worth living. Besides, I don't think the Axes intend taking any prisoners."

"You're right," said Scone. But he seemed hesitant.

"You're wondering why I'm falling in so quickly with your plan to wreck the control center?" said Broward. "You think I'm a Russky agent?"

"I didn't say I intended to wreck the transmitters," said Scone. "No. I know what you are. Or, I think I do. You're not a Russky. You're a . . ."

Scone stopped. Like Broward, he felt the rock floor quiver, then start shaking. And a low rumbling reached them, coming up through their feet before their ears detected it.

Scone, instead of throwing himself flat on the floor—an instinctive but useless maneuver—jumped up from his squatting position.

"Now! Now! The others'll be too scared to move!"

BROWARD rose, though he wanted to cling to the floor. Directly below them—or, perhaps, to the side but still underground—a white-hot "tongue" was blasting a narrow tunnel through the rock. Behind it, also hidden within the rock, in a shaft which the vessel must have taken a long time to sink without being detected, was a battlebird. Only a large ship could carry the huge generators required to drive a tongue that would damage a base. A tongue, or snake, as it was sometimes called. A flexible beam of "straightened-out" photons, the ultimate development of the laser.

And when the tongue reached the end of the determined tunnel, then the photons would be "unsprung". And all the energy crammed into the compressed photons would dissipate.

"Follow me!" said Scone, and he began running.

Broward took a step, halted in amazement, called out, "The suits . . . other way!"

Then, he resumed running after Scone. Evidently, the colonel was not concerned about the dome cracking wide open. His only thought was for the bonephone controls.

Broward expected to be cut down under a storm of bullets. But the room was silent except for the groans of some wounded. And the ever-increasing rumble from deep under.

The survivors of the fight were too intent on the menace probing beneath them to pay attention to

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the two runners—if they saw them.

That is, until Scone bounded through the nearest exit from the dome in a great leap afforded by the Moon's weak gravity. He almost hit his head on the edge of the doorway.

Then, somebody shot at Broward. But his body, too, was flying through the exit, his legs pulled up, and the three bullets passed beneath him and blew holes in the rock wall ahead of him.

Broward slammed into the wall and fell back on the floor. Though half-stunned, he managed to roll past the corner, out of line of fire, into the hallway. He rose, breathing hard, and checked to make sure he had not broken his numbed wrists and hands, which had cushioned much of his impact against the wall. And he was thankful that the tongues needed generators too massive to be compacted into hand weapons. If the Axes had been able to smuggle tonguers into the dome, they could have wiped out every Soviet on the base.

The rumble became louder. The rock beneath his feet shook. The walls quivered like jelly. Then . . .

Not the ripping upwards of the floor beneath his feet, the ravening blast opening the rock and lashing out at him with sear of fire and blow of air to burn him and crush him against the ceiling at the same time.

From somewhere deep and off to one side was an explosion. The rock swelled. Then, subsided.

SILENCE.

Only his breathing.

For about six seconds while he thought that the Russian ships stationed outside the base must have located the sunken Axis vessel and destroyed it just before it blew up the base.

From the dome, a hell's concerto of small-gun fire.

Broward ran again, leaping over the twisted and shattered bodies of Russians and Axes. Here the attacking officers had been met by Soviet guards, and the two groups had destroyed each other.

Far down the corridor, Scone's tall body was hurtling along, taking the giant steps only a longtime Lunie could safely handle. He rounded a corner, was gone down a branching corridor.

Broward, following Scone, entered two more branches, and then stopped when he heard the boom of a .45. Two more booms. Silence. Broward cautiously stuck his head around the corner.

He saw two Russian soldiers on the floor, their weapons close to their lifeless hands. Down the hall, Scone was running.

Broward did not understand.

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He could only surmise that the Russians had been so surprised by Scone that they had fired, or tried to fire, before they recognized the North American uniform. And Scone had shot in self-defense.

But the corridors were well lit with electroluminescent panels. All three should have seen at once that none wore the silver of Argentina or the scarlet and brown of the South Africans. So. . . ?

He did not know. Scone could tell him, but Broward would have trouble catching up with him.

Then, once more, he heard the echoes of a .45 bouncing around the distant corner of the hall.

When Broward rounded the turn as cautiously as he had the previous one, he saw two more dead Russians. And he saw Scone rifling the pockets of the officer of the two.

"Scone!" he shouted so the man would not shoot him, too, in a frenzy. "It's Broward!"

Coming closer, he said, "What-'re you doing?"

Scone rose from the officer with a thin plastic cylinder about a decimeter long in one hand. With the other hand, he pointed his .45 at Broward's solar plexus.

"I'm going to blow up the controls and the transmitters," he said. "What did you think?"

Choking, Broward said, "You-'re not working for the Axis?"

He did not believe Scone was. But, in his astonishment, he could only think of that as a reason for Scone's behavior. Despite his accusation about Scone's intentions, he had not really believed the man meant to do more than insure that the controls did not fall into Axis hands.

Scone said, "Those swine! No! I'm just making sure that the Axes will not be able to use the bonephones if they do seize this office. Besides, I have never liked the idea of being under Russian control. These hellish devices . . ."

Broward pointed at the corpses. "Why?"

"They had their orders," said Scone. "Which were to allow no one into the control room without proper authorization. I didn't want to argue and so put them on their guard. I had to do what was expedient."

Scone glared at Broward, and he said, "Expediency is going to be the rule for this day. No matter who suffers."

Broward said, "You don't have to kill me, too. I am an American. If I could think as coolly as you, I might have done the same thing myself."

He paused, took a deep breath, and said, "Perhaps, you didn't do this on the spur of the moment. Perhaps, you planned this long before. If such a situation as this gave you a chance."

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"We haven't time to stand here gabbing," said Scone.

HE backed away, his gun and gaze steady on Broward. With his other hand, he felt around until the free end of the thin tube fitted into the depression in the middle of the door. He pressed in on the key, and (the correct sequence of radio frequencies activating the unlocking circuit) the door opened.

Scone motioned for Broward to precede him. Broward entered. Scone came in, and the door closed behind him.

"I thought I should kill you when we were behind the bank," said Scone. "But you weren't—as far as I had been able to determine—a Russian agent. Far from it. And you were, as you said, a fellow American. But . . ."

Broward looked at the far wall with its array on array of indicator lights, switches, pushbuttons, and slots for admission of coded cards and tapes.

He turned to Scone, and he said, "Time for us to quit being coy. I've known for a long time that you were the chief of a Nationalist underground."

For the first time since Broward had known him, Scone's face cracked wide open.

"What?"

Then, the cracks closed up, the cliff-front was solid again.

"Why didn't you report me. Or are you. . . ?"

"Not of your movement, no," said Broward. "I'm an Athenian. You've heard of us?"

"I know of them," said Scone. "A lunatic fringe. Neither Russ, Chinese, nor Yank. I had suspected that you weren't a very solid Marxist. Why tell me this?"

"I want to talk you out of destroying the controls and the transmitters," said Broward.

"Why?"

"Don't blow them up. Given time, the Russ could build another set. And we'd be under their control again. Don't destroy them. Plant a bomb which can be set off by remote control. The moment they try to use the phones to paralyze us, blow up the transmitters. That might give us time to remove the phones from our skulls with surgery. Or insulate the phones against reception. Or, maybe, strike at the Russkies. If fighting back is what you have in mind. I don't know how far your Nationalism goes."

"That might be better," said Scone, his voice flat, not betraying any enthusiasm for the plan. "Can I depend upon you and your people?"

"I'll be frank. If you intend to try for complete independence of the Russians, you'll have our wholehearted cooperation. Until we are independent."

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"And after that—what then?"

"We believe in violence only after all other means have failed. Of course, mental persuasion was useless with the Russians. With fellow Americans, well . . ."

"How many people do you have at Clavius?"

Broward hesitated, then said, "Four. All absolutely dependable. Under my orders. And you?"

"More than you," said Scone. "You understand that I'm not sharing the command with you? We can't take time out to confer. We need a man who can give orders to be carried out instantly. And my word will be life or death? No argument?"

"No time now for discussions of policy. I can see that. Yes. I place myself and my people under your orders. But what about the other Americans? Some are fanatical Marxists. Some are unknown, X."

"We'll weed out the bad ones," said Scone. "I don't mean by bad the genuine Marxists. I'm one myself. I mean the non-Nationalists. If anyone wants to go to the Russians, we let them go. Or if anybody fights us, they die."

"Couldn't we just continue to keep them prisoners?"

"On the Moon? Where every mouth needs two pairs of hands to keep breathing and eating? Where even one parasite may mean eventual death for all others? No!"

Broward said, "All right. They die. I hope . . ."

"Hopes are something to be tested," said Scone. "Let's get to work. There should be plenty of components here with which to rig up a control for the bomb. And I have the bomb taped to my belly."

YOU won't have to untape your bomb," said Broward. "The transmitters are mined. So are the generators."

"How did you do it? And why didn't you tell me you'd already done it?"

"The Russians have succeeded in making us Americans distrust each other," said Broward. "Like everybody else, I don't reveal information until I absolutely have to. As to your first question, I'm not only a doctor, I'm also a physical anthropologist engaged in a Moonwide project. I frequently attend conferences at this base, stay here several sleeps. And what you did so permanently with your gun, I did temporarily with a sleep-inducing aerosol. But, now that we understand each other, let's get out."

"Not until I see the bombs you say you've planted."

Broward smiled. Then, working swiftly with a screwdriver he took from a drawer, he removed several wall-panels. Scone looked into the recesses and examined the component boards, functional

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blocks, and wires which jammed the interior.

"I don't see any explosives," Scone said.

"Good," said Broward. "Neither will the Russians, unless they measure the closeness of the walls to the equipment. The explosive is spread out over the walls in a thin layer which is colored to match the original green. Also, thin strips of a chemical are glued to the walls. This chemical is temperature-sensitive. When the transmitters are operating and reach maximum radiation of heat, the strips melt. And the chemicals released interact with the explosive, detonate it."

"Ingenious," said Scone somewhat sourly. "We don't . . ." and he stopped.

"Have such stuff? No wonder. As far as I know, the detonator and explosive were made here on the Moon. In our lab at Clavius."

"If you could get into this room without being detected and could also smuggle all that stuff from Clavius, then the Russ can be beaten," said Scone.

Now, Broward was surprised. "You doubted they could?"

"Never. But all the odds were on their side. And you know what a conditioning they give us from the day we enter kindergarten."

"Yes. The picture of the all-knowing, all-powerful Russian backed by the force of destiny itself, the inevitable rolling forward and unfolding of History as expounded by the great prophet, the only prophet, Marx. But it's not true. They're human."

THEY replaced the panels and the screwdriver and left the room. Just as they entered the hall, and the door swung shut behind them, they heard the thumps of boots and shouts. Scone had just straightened up from putting the key back into the dead officer's pocket when six Russians trotted around the corner. Their officer was carrying a burp gun, the others, automatic rifles.

"Don't shoot!" yelled Scone in Russian. "Americans! USAF!"

The captain, whom both Americans had seen several times before, lowered her burper.

"It's fortunate that I recognized you," she said. "We just killed three Axes who were dressed in Russian uniforms. They shot four of my men before we cut them down. I wasn't about to take a chance you might not be in disguise, too."

She gestured at the dead men. "The Axes got them, too?"

"Yes," said Scone. "But I don't know if any Axes are in there."

He pointed at the door to the control room.

"If there were, we'd all be screaming with pain," said the

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captain. "Anyway, they would have had to take the key from the officer on guard."

She looked suspiciously at the two, but Scone said, "You'll have to search him. I didn't touch him, of course."

She dropped to one knee and unbuttoned the officer's inner coatpocket, which Scone had not neglected to rebutton after replacing the key.

Rising with the key, she said, "I think you two must go back to the dome."

Scone's face did not change expression at this evidence of distrust. Broward smiled slightly.

"By the way," she said, "what are you doing here?"

"We escaped from the dome," said Broward. "We heard firing down this way, and we thought we should protect our rear before going back into the dome. We found dead Russians, but we never did see the enemy. They must have been the ones you ran into."

"Perhaps," she said. "You must go. You know the rules. No unauthorized personnel near the BR."

"No non-Russians, anyway," said Scone flatly. "I know. But this is an emergency."

"You must go," she said, raising the barrel of her gun. She did not point it at them, but they did not doubt she would.

Scone turned and strode off, Broward following. When they had turned the first corner, Scone said, "We must leave the base on the first excuse. We *have* to get back to Clavius."

"So we can start our own war?"

"Not necessarily. Just declare indpendence. The Russ may have their belly full of death."

"Why not wait until we find out what the situation on Earth is? If the Russians have any strength left on Earth, we may be crushed."

"Now!" said Scone. "If we give the Russ and the Chinese time to recover from the shock, we lose our advantage."

"Things are going too fast for me, too," said Broward. "I haven't time or ability to think straight now. But I have thought of this. Earth could be wiped out. If so, we on the Moon are the only human beings left alive in the universe. And . . ."

"There are the Martian colonies. And the Ganymedan and Mercutian bases."

"We don't know what's happened to them. Why start something which may end the entire human species? Perhaps, ideology should be subordinated for survival. We need every man and woman, every . . ."

"We must take the chance that the Russians and Chinese won't care to risk making *Homo sapiens* extinct. They'll have to cooperate, let us go free.

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"We don't have time to talk. Act now; talk after it's all over."

But Scone did not stop talking. During their passage through the corridors, he made one more statement.

"The key to peace on the Moon, and to control of this situation, is the *Zemlya*."

Broward was puzzled. He knew Scone was referring to the Brobdingnagian interstellar exploration vessel which had just been built and outfitted and was now orbiting around Earth. The *Zemlya* (Russian for Earth) had been scheduled to leave within a few days for its ten year voyage to Alpha Centaurus and, perhaps, the stars beyond. What the *Zemlya* could have to do with establishing peace on the Moon was beyond Broward. And Scone did not seem disposed to explain.

Just then, they passed a full-length mirror, and Broward saw their images. Scone looked like a mountain of stone walking. And he, Broward thought, he himself looked like a man of leather. His shorter image, dark brown where the skin showed, his head shaven so the naked skull seemed to be overlaid with leather, his brown eyes contrasting with the rock-pale eyes of Scone, his lips so thick compared with Scone's, which were like a thin groove cut into granite. Leather against stone. Stone could outwear leather. But leather was more flexible.

Was the analogy, as so many, false? Or only partly true?

Broward tended to think in analogies; Scone, directly.

At the moment, a man like Scone was needed. Practical, quick reacting. But, like so many practical men, impractical when it came to long range and philosophical thinking. Not much at extrapolation beyond the immediate. Broward would follow him up to a point. Then . . .

THEY came to the entrance to the dome. Only the sound of voices came from it. Together, they stuck their heads around the side of the entrance. And they saw many dead, some wounded, a few men and women standing together near the center of the floor. All, except one, were in the variously colored and marked uniforms of the Soviet Republics. The exception was a tall man in the silver dress uniform of Argentine. His right arm hung limp and bloody; his skin was grey.

"Colonel Lorentz," said Scone. "We've one prisoner, at least."

After shouting to those within the dome not to fire, the two walked in. Major Panchurin, the highest-ranking Russian survivor, lifted a hand to acknowledge their salute. He was too busy talking over the bonephone to say anything to them.

The two examined the dome.

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The visiting delegation of Axis officers was dead except for Lorentz. The Russians left standing numbered six; the Chinese, four; the Europeans, one; the Arabic, two; the Indian-East Asiatic, none. There were four Americans alive. Broward. Scone. Captain Nashdoi. And a badly wounded woman, Major Hoebel.

Browards walked towards Hoebel to examine her. Before he could do anything the Russian doctor, Titiev, rose from her side. He said, "I'm sorry, captain. She isn't going to make it."

Broward looked around the dome and made a remark which must, at the time, have seemed irrelevant to Titiev. "Only three women left. If the ratio is the same on the rest of the Moon, we've a real problem."

Scone had followed Broward. After Titiev had left, and after making sure their bonephones were not on, Scone said in a low voice, "There were seventy-five Russians stationed here. I doubt if there are over forty left in the entire base. I wonder how many in Pushkin?"

Pushkin was the base on the other side of the Moon.

They walked back to the group around Panchurin and turned on their phones so they could listen in.

Panchurin's skin paled, his eyes widened, his hands raised protestingly.

"No, no," he moaned out loud.

"What is it?" said Scone, who had heard only the last three words coming in through the device implanted in his skull.

Panchurin turned a suddenly old face to him. "The commander of the *Zemlya* said that the Argentineans have set off an undetermined number of cobalt bombs. More than twenty, at the very least."

He added, "The *Zemlya* is leaving its orbit. It intends to establish a new one around the Moon. It won't leave until we evaluate our situation. If then."

Every Soviet in the room looked at Lorentz.

THE Argentinean straightened up from his weary slump and summoned all the strength left in his bleeding body. He spoke in Russian so all would understand.

"We told you pigs we would take the whole world with us before we'd bend our necks to the Communist yoke!" he shouted.

At that moment, his gaunt high-cheekboned face with its long upper lip, thin lipline mustache, and fanatical blue eyes made him resemble the dictator of his country, Félipé Howards, El Macho (The Sledgehammer).

Panchurin ordered two soldiers and the doctor to take him to the jail. "I would like to kill the beast now," he said. "But he may have valuable information. Make sure

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he lives . . . for the time being."

Then, Panchurin looked upwards again to Earth, hanging only a little distance above the horizon. The others also stared.

Earth, dark now, except for steady glares here and there, forest fires and cities, probably, which would burn for days. Perhaps weeks. Then, when the fires died out, the embers cooled, no more fire. No more vegetation, no more animals, no more human beings. Not for centuries.

Suddenly, Panchurin's face crumpled, tears flowed, and he began sobbing loudly, rackingly.

The others could not withstand this show of grief. They understood now. The shock had worn off enough to allow sorrow to have its way. Grief ran through them like fire through the forests of their native homes.

Broward, also weeping, looked at Scone and could not understand. Scone, alone among the men and women under the dome and the Earth, was not crying. His face was as impassive as the slope of a Moon mountain.

Scone did not wait for Panchurin to master himself, to think clearly. He said, "I request permission to return to Clavius, sir."

Panchurin could not speak; he could only nod his head.

"Do you know what the situation is at Clavius?" said Scone relentlessly.

Panchurin managed a few words. "Some missiles . . . Axis base . . . came close . . . but no damage . . . intercepted."

Scone saluted, turned, and beckoned to Broward and Nashdoi. They followed him to the exit to the field. Here Scone made sure that the air-retaining and gamma-ray and sun-deflecting force field outside the dome was on. Then the North Americans stepped outside onto the field without their spacesuits. They had done this so many times they no longer felt the fear and helplessness first experienced upon venturing from the protecting walls into what seemed empty space. They entered their craft, and Scone took over the controls.

After identifying himself to the control tower, Scone lifted the dish and brought it to the very edge of the force field. He put the controls on automatic, the field disappeared for the two seconds necessary for the craft to pass the boundary, and the dish, impelled by its own power and by the push of escaping air, shot forward.

Behind them, the faint flicker indicating the presence of the field returned. And the escaped air formed brief and bright streamers that melted under the full impact of the sun.

"That's something that will have to be rectified in the future," said Scone. "It's an inef-

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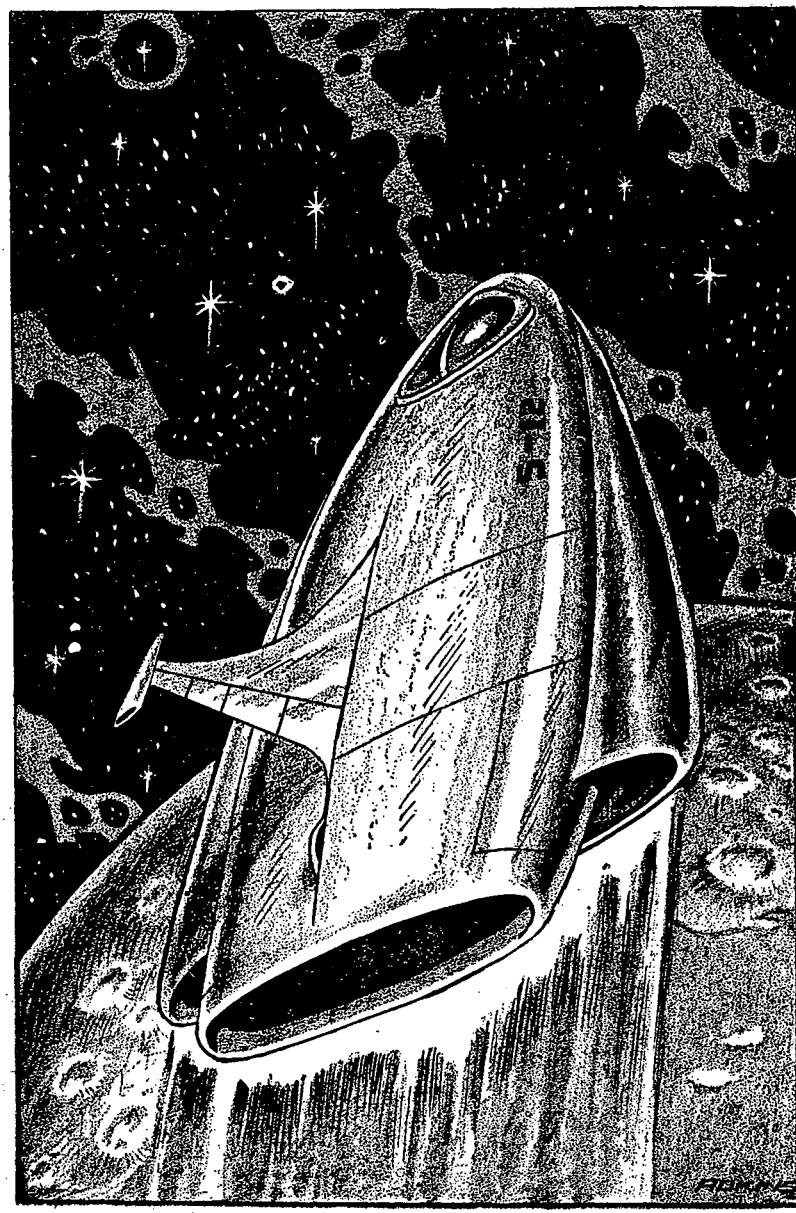

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ficient, air-wasting method. We're not so long on power we can use it to make more air every time a dish enters or leaves a field."

He returned on the r-t, contacted Clavius, told them they were coming in. To the operator, he said, "Pei, how're things going?"

"We're still at battle stations, sir. Though we doubt if there will be any more attacks. Both the Argentinean and South African bases were wrecked. They don't have any retaliatory capabilities, but survivors may be left deep underground. We've received no orders from Eratosthenes to dispatch searchers to look for survivors. The base at Pushkin doesn't answer. It must . . ."

THERE was a crackling and a roar. When the noise died down, a voice in Russian said, "This is Eratosthenes. You will refrain from further radio communication until permission is received to resume. Acknowledge."

"Colonel Scone on the United Soviet Americas Force destroyer *Broun*. Order acknowledged."

He flipped the switch off. To Broward, he said, "Damn Russkies are starting to clamp down already. But they're rattled. Did you notice I was talking to Pei in English, and they didn't say a thing about that? I don't think they'll take much effective action or start any witch-hunts until they recover fully from the shock and have a chance to evaluate.

"Tell me, is Nashdoi one of you Athenians?"

Broward looked at Nashdoi, who was slumped on a seat at the other end of the bridge. She was not within earshot of a low voice.

"No," said Broward. "I don't think she's anything but a lukewarm Marxist. She's a member of the Party, of course. Who on the Moon isn't? But like so many scientists here, she takes a minimum interest in ideology, just enough not to be turned down when she applied for psychological research here.

"She was married, you know. Her husband was called back to Earth only a little while ago. No one knew if it was for the reasons given or if he'd done something to displease the Russkies or arouse their suspicions. You know how it is. You're called back, and maybe you're never heard of again."

"What other way is there?" said Scone. "Although I don't like the Russky dictating the fate of any American."

"Yes?" said Broward. He looked curiously at Scone, thinking of what a mass of contradictions, from his viewpoint, existed inside that massive head. Scone believed thoroughly in the Soviet

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system except for one thing. He was a Nationalist; he wanted an absolutely independent North American republic, one which would reassert its place as the strongest in the world.

And that made him dangerous to the Russians and the Chinese.

AMERICA had fallen, prey more to its own softness and confusion than to the machinations of the Soviets. Then, in the turbulent bloody starving years that followed the fall with their purges, uprisings, savage repressions, mass transportations to Siberia and other areas, importation of other nationalities to create division, and bludgeoning propaganda and reeducation, only the strong and the intelligent survived.

Scone, Broward, and Nashdoi were of the second generation born after the fall of Canada and the United States. They had been born and had lived because their parents were flexible, hardy, and quick. And because they had inherited and improved these qualities.

The Americans had become a problem to the Russians. And to the Chinese. Those Americans transported to Siberia had, together with other nationalities brought to that area, performed miracles with the harsh climate and soil, had made a garden. But they had become Siberians, not too friendly with the Russians.

China, to the south, looking for an area in which to dump their excess population, had protested at the bringing in of other nationalities. Russia's refusal to permit Chinese entry had been one more added to the long list of grievances felt by China towards her elder brother in the Marx family.

And on the North American continent, the American Communists had become another trial to Moscow. Russia, rich with loot from the U.S., had become fat. The lean underfed hungry Americans, using the Party to work within, had alarmed the Russians with their increasing power and influence. Moreover, America had recovered, was again a great industrial empire. Ostensibly under Russian control, the Americans were pushing and pressuring subtly, and not so subtly, to get their own way. Moscow had to resist being Uncle Samified.

To complicate the world picture, thousands of North Americans had taken refuge during the fall of their country in Argentine. And there the energetic and tough-minded Yanks (the soft and foolish died on the way or after reaching Argentine) followed the paths of thousands of Italians and Germans who had fled there long ago. They became rich and powerful; Félipé Howards, El Macho, was part-Argen-

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tinean Spanish, part-German, part-American.

The South African (sub-Saharan) peoples had ousted their Communist and Fascist rulers because they were white or white-influenced. Pan-Africanism was their motto. Recently, the South African Confederation had formed an alliance with Argentine. And the Axis had warned the Soviets that they must cease all underground activity in Axis countries, cease at once the terrible economic pressures and discriminations against them, and treat them as full partners in the nations of the world.

If this were not done, and if a war started, and the Argentineans saw their country was about to be crushed, they would explode cobalt bombs. Rather death than dishonor.

The Soviets knew the temper of the proud and arrogant Argentineans. They had seemed to capitulate. There was a conference among the heads of the leading Soviets and Axes. Peaceful coexistence was being talked about.

But, apparently, the Axis had not swallowed this phrase as others had once swallowed it. And they had decided on a desperate move.

Having cheap lithium bombs and photon compressors and the means to deliver them with gravitomagnetic drives, the Axis was as well armed as their foes. Perhaps, their thought must have been, if they delivered the first blow, their anti-missiles could intercept enough Soviet missiles so that the few that did get through would do a minimum of damage. Perhaps. No one really knew what caused the Axis to start the war.

Whatever the decision of the Axis, the Axis had put on a good show. One of its features was the visit by their Moon officers to the base at Eratosthenes, the first presumably, in a series of reciprocal visits and parties to toast the new amiable relations.

Result: a dying Earth and a torn Moon.

BROWARD belonged to that small underground which neither believed in the old Soviet nor the old capitalist system. It wanted a form of government based on the ancient Athenian method of democracy on the local level and a loose confederation on the world level. All national boundaries would be abolished.

Such considerations, thought Broward, must be put aside for the time being. Getting independence of the Russians, getting rid of the hellish bonephones, was the thing to do now. Or so it had seemed to him.

But would not that inevitably lead to war and the destruction of all of humanity? Would it not

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be better to work with the other Soviets and hope that eventually the Communist ideal could be subverted and the Athenian established? With communities so small, the modified Athenian form of government would be workable. Later, after the Moon colonies increased in size and population, means could be found for working out intercolonial problems.

Or perhaps, thought Broward, watching the monolithic Scone, Scone did not really intend to force the other Soviets to cooperate? Perhaps, he hoped they would fight to the death and the North American base alone would be left to repopulate the world.

"Broward," said Scone, "go sound out Nashdoi. Do it subtly."

"Wise as the serpent, subtle as the dove," said Broward. "Or is it the other way around?"

Scone lifted his eyebrows. "Never heard that before. From what book?"

Broward walked away without answering. It was significant that Scone did not know the source of the quotation. The Old and New Testaments were allowed reading only for select scholars. Broward had read an illegal copy, had put his freedom and life in jeopardy by reading it.

But that was not the point here. The thought that occurred to him was that, nationality and race aside, the people on the Moon were a rather homogeneous group. Three-fourths of them were engineers or scientists of high standing, therefore, had high I.Q.'s. They were descended from ancestors who had proved their toughness and good genes by surviving through the last hundred years. They were all either agnostics or atheists or supposed to be so. There would not be any religious differences to split them. They were all in superb health, otherwise they would not be here. No diseases among them, not even the common cold. They would all make good breeding stock. Moreover, with recent advances in genetic manipulation, defective genes could be eliminated electrochemically. Such a manipulation had not been possible on Earth with its vast population where babies were being born faster than defective genes could be wiped out. But here where there were so few . . .

Perhaps, it would be better to allow the Soviet system to exist for now. Later, use subtle means to bend it towards the desired goal.

No! The system was based on too many falsities, among which the greatest was dialectical materialism. As long as the corrupt base existed, the structure would be corrupt.

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BROWARD sat down by Ingrid Nashdoi. She was a short dark and petite woman of about thirty-three. Not very good-looking but, usually, witty and vivacious. Now, she stared at the floor, her face frozen.

"I'm sorry about Jim," he said. "But we don't have time to grieve now. Later, perhaps."

She did not look at him but replied in a low halting voice. "He may have been dead before the war started. I never even got to say goodbye to him. You know what that means. What it probably did mean."

"I don't think they got anything out of him. Otherwise, you and I would have been arrested, too."

He jerked his head towards Scone and said, "He doesn't know you're one of us. I want him to think you're a candidate for the Nationalists. After this struggle with the Russ is over, we may need someone who can report on him. Think you can do it?"

She nodded her head, and Broward returned to Scone. "She hates the Russians," he said. "You know they took her husband away. She doesn't know why. But she hates Ivan's guts."

"Good. Ah, here we go."

After the destroyer had berthed at Clavius, and the three entered the base, events went swiftly if not smoothly. Scone talked to the entire personnel over the IP, told them what had happened. Then he went to his office and issued orders to have the arsenal cleaned out of all portable weapons. These were transferred to the four destroyers the Russians had assigned to Clavius as a token force.

Broward then called in his four Athenians and Scone, his five Nationalists. The situation was explained to them, and they were informed of what was expected of them. Even Broward was startled, but didn't protest.

After the weapons had been placed in the destroyers, Scone ordered the military into his office one at a time. And, one at a time, they were disarmed and escorted by another door to the arsenal and locked in. Three of the soldiers asked to join Scone, and he accepted two. Several protested furiously and denounced Scone as a traitor.

Then, Scone had the civilians assembled in the large auditorium (Technically, all personnel were in the military, but the scientists were only used in that capacity during emergencies.) Here, he told them what he had done, what he planned to do—except for one thing—and asked them if they wished to enlist. Again, he got a violent demonstration from some and sullen silence from others. These were locked up in the arsenal.

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The others were sworn in, except for one man, Whiteside. Broward pointed him out as an agent and informer for both the Russians and Chinese. Scone admitted that he had not known about the triple-dealer, but he took Broward's word and had Whiteside locked up, too.

Then, the radios of the two scout ships were smashed, and the prisoners marched out and jammed into them. Scone told them they were free to fly to the Russian base. Within a few minutes, the scouts hurtled away from Clavius towards the north.

"But, Colonel," said Broward, "they can't give the identifying code to the Russians. They'll be shot down."

"They are traitors; they prefer the Russky to us. Better for us if they are shot down. They'll not fight for Ivan."

Broward did not have much appetite when he sat down to eat and to listen to Scone's detailing of his plan.

"The *Zemlya*," he said, "has everything we need to sustain us here. And to clothe the Earth with vegetation and replace her animal life in the distant future when the radiation is low enough for us to return. Her deepfreeze tanks contain seeds and plants of thousands of different species of vegetation. They also hold, in suspended animation, the bodies of cattle, sheep, horses, rabbits, dogs, cats, fowl, birds, useful insects and worms. The original intention was to reanimate these and use them on any Terrestrial-type planet the *Zemlya* might find.

"Now, our bases here are self-sustaining. But, when the time comes to return to Earth, we must have vegetation and animals. Otherwise, what's the use?

"So, whoever holds the *Zemlya* holds the key to the future. We must be the ones who hold that key. With it, we can bargain; the Russians and the Chinese will have to agree to independence if they want to share in the seeds and livestock."

"What if the *Zemlya's* commander chooses destruction of his vessel rather than surrender?" said Broward. "Then, all of humanity will be robbed. We'll have no future."

"I have a plan to get us aboard the *Zemlya* without violence."

AN hour later, the four USAF destroyers accelerated outwards towards Earth. Their radar had picked up the *Zemlya;* it also had detected five other Unidentified Space Objects. These were the size of their own craft.

Abruptly, the *Zemlya* radioed that it was being attacked. Then, silence. No answer to the requests from Eratosthenes for more information.

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Scone had no doubt about the attackers' identity. "The Axis leaders wouldn't have stayed on Earth to die," he said. "They'll be on their way to their big base on Mars. Or, more likely, they have the same idea as us. Capture the *Zemlya*."

"And if they do?" said Broward.

"We take it from them."

The four vessels continued to accelerate in the great curve which would take them out away from the *Zemyla* and then would bring them around towards the Moon again. Their path was computed to swing them around so they would come up behind the interstellar ship and overtake it. Though the titanic globe was capable of eventually achieving far greater speeds than the destroyers, it was proceeding at a comparatively slow velocity. This speed was determined by the orbit around the Moon into which the *Zemlya* intended to slip.

In ten hours, the USAF complement had curved around and were about 10,000 kilometers from the *Zemlya*. Their speed was approximately 20,000 kilometers an hour at this point, but they were decelerating. The Moon was bulking larger; ahead of them, visible by the eye, were two steady gleams. The *Zemlya* and the only Axis vessel which had not been blown to bits or sliced to fragments. According to the *Zemlya*, which was again in contact with the Russian base, the Axis ship had been cut in two by a tongue from *Zemlya*.

But the interstellar ship was now defenseless. It had launched every missile and anti-missile in its arsenal. And the fuel for the tongue-generators was exhausted.

"Furthermore," said Shaposhnikov, commander of the *Zemlya*, "new USO has been picked up on the radar. Four coming in from Earth. If these are also Axis, then the *Zemlya* has only two choices. Surrender. Or destroy itself."

"There is nothing we can do." replied Eratosthenes. "But we do not think those USO are Axis. We detected four destroyer-sized objects leaving the vicinity of the USAF base, and we asked them for identification. They did not answer, but we have reason to believe they are North American."

"Perhaps they are coming to our rescue," suggested Shaposhnikov.

"They left before anyone knew you were being attacked. Besides, they had no orders from us."

"What do I do?" said Shaposhnikov.

Scone, who had tapped into the tight laser beam, broke it up by sending random pulses into it. The *Zemlya* discontinued its beam, and Scone then sent them

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a message through a pulsed tongue which the Russian base could tap into only through a wild chance.

After transmitting the proper code identification, Scone said, "Don't renew contact with Eratosthenes. It is held by the Axis. They're trying to lure you close enough to grab you. We escaped the destruction of our base. Let me aboard where we can confer about our next step. Perhaps, we may have to go to Alpha Centaurus with you."

FOR several minutes, the *Zemlya* did not answer. Shaposhnikov must have been unnerved. Undoubtedly, he was in a quandary. In any case, he could not prevent the strangers from approaching. If they were Axis, they had him at their mercy.

Such must have been his reasoning. He replied, "Come ahead."

By then, the USAF dishes had matched their speeds to that of the *Zemlya's*. From a distance of only a kilometer, the sphere looked like a small Earth. It even had the continents painted on the surface, though the effect was spoiled by the big Russian letters painted on the Pacific Ocean.

Scone gave a lateral thrust to his vessel, and it nudged gently into the enormous landing-port of the sphere. Within five minutes, his crew of ten were in the control room.

Scone did not waste any time. He drew his gun; his men followed suit; he told Shaposhnikov what he meant to do. The Russian, a tall thin man of about fifty, seemed numbed. Perhaps, too many catastrophes had happened in too short a time. The death of Earth, the attack by the Axis ships, and, now, totally unexpected, this. The world was coming to an end in too many shapes and too swiftly.

Scone cleared the control room of all *Zemlya* personnel except the commander. The others were locked up with the forty-odd men and women who were surprised at their posts by the Americans.

Scone ordered Shaposhnikov to set up orders to the navigational computer for a new path. This one would send the *Zemlya* at the maximum acceleration endurable by the personnel towards a point in the south polar region near Clavius. When the *Zemlya* reached the proper distance, it would begin a deceleration equally taxing which would bring it to a halt approximately half a kilometer above the surface at the indicated point.

Shaposhnikov, speaking disjointedly like a man coming up out of a nightmare, protested that the *Zemlya* was not built to stand such a strain. Moreover, if Scone succeeded in his plan to hide the great globe at the bottom of a chasm under an overhang

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. . . Well, he could only predict that the lower half of the *Zemlya* would be crushed under the weight—even with the Moon's weak gravity.

"That won't harm the animal tanks," said Scone. "They're in the upper levels. Do as I say. If you don't, I'll shoot you and set up the computer myself."

"You are mad," said Shaposhnikov. "But I will do my best to get us down safely. If this were ordinary war, if we weren't man's —Earth's—last hope, I would tell you to go ahead, shoot. But . . ."

Ingrid Nashdoi, standing beside Broward, whispered in a trembling voice, "The Russian is right. He is mad. It's too great a gamble. If we lose, then everybody loses."

"Exactly what Scone is betting on," murmured Broward. "He knows the Russians and Chinese know it, too. Like you, I'm scared. If I could have foreseen what he was going to do, I think I'd have put a bullet in him back at Eratosthenes. But it's too late to back out now. We go along with him no matter what."

THE voyage from the Moon and the capture of the *Zemlya* had taken twelve hours. Now, with the *Zemlya's* mighty drive applied—and the four destroyers riding in the landing-port—the voyage back took three hours. During this time, the Russian base sent messages. Scone refused to answer. He intended to tell all the Moon his plans but not until the *Zemlya* was close to the end of its path. When the globe was a thousand kilometers from the surface, and decelerating with the force of 3g's, he and his men returned to the destroyers. All except three, who remained with Shaposhnikov.

The destroyers streaked ahead of the *Zemlya* towards an entrance to a narrow canyon. This led downwards to a chasm where Scone intended to place the *Zemlya* beneath a giant overhang.

But, as the four sped towards the opening two crags, their radar picked up four objects coming over close to the mountains to the north. A battlebird and three destroyers. Scone knew that the Russians had another big craft and three more destroyers available. But they probably did not want to send them out, too, and leave the base comparatively defenseless.

He at once radioed the commander of the *Lermontov* and told him what was going on.

"We declare independence, a return to Nationalism," he concluded. "And we call on the other bases to do the same."

The commander roared, "Unless you surrender at once, we turn on the bonephones! And you

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will writhe in pain until you die, you American swine!"

"Do that little thing," said Scone, and he laughed.

He switched on the communication beams linking the four ships and said, "Hang on for a minute or two, men. Then, it'll be all over. For us and for them."

Two minutes later, the pain began. A stroke of heat like lightning that seemed to sear the brains in their skulls. They screamed, all except Scone, who grew pale and clutched the edge of the control panel. But the dishes were, for the next two minutes, on automatic, unaffected by their pilots' condition.

And then, just as suddenly as it had started, the pain died. They were left shaking and sick, but they knew they would not feel that unbearable agony again.

"Flutter your craft as if it's going out of control," said Scone. "Make it seem we're crashing into the entrance to the canyon."

Scone himself put the lead destroyer through the simulation of a craft with a pain-crazed pilot at the controls. The others followed his maneuvers, and they slipped into the canyon.

From over the top of the cliff to their left rose a glare that would have been intolerable if the plastic over the portholes had not automatically polarized to dim the brightness.

BROWARD, looking through a screen which showed the view to the rear, cried out. Not because of the light from the atomic bomb which had exploded on the other side of the cliff. He yelled because the top of the *Zemlya* had also lit up. And he knew in that second what had happened. The light did not come from the warhead, for an extremely high mountain was between the huge globe and the blast. If the upper region of the *Zemlya* glowed, it was because a tongue from a Russian ship had brushed against it.

It must have been an accident, for the Russians surely had no wish to wreck the *Zemlya*. If they defeated the USAF, they could recapture the globe with no trouble.

"My God, she's falling!" yelled Broward. "Out of control!"

Scone looked once and quickly. He turned away and said, "All craft land immediately. All personnel transfer to my ship."

The maneuver took three minutes, for the men in the other dishes had to connect air tanks to their suits and then run from their ships to Scone's. Moreover, one man in each destroyer was later than his fellows since he had to set up the controls on his craft.

Scone did not explain what he meant to do until all personnel

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had made the transfer. In the meantime, they were at the mercy of the Russians if the enemy had chosen to attack over the top of the cliff. But scone was gambling that the Russians would be too horrified at what was happening to the *Zemlya*. His own men would have been frozen if he had not compelled them to act. The Earth dying twice within twenty-four hours was almost more than they could endure.

Only the American commander, the man of stone, seemed not to feel.

Scone took his ship up against the face of the cliff until she was just below the top. Here the cliff was thin because of the slope on the other side. And here, hidden from view of the Russians, he drove a tongue two decimeters wide through the rock.

And, at the moment three Russian destroyers hurtled over the edge, tongues of compressed light lashing out on every side in the classic flailing movement, Scone's beam broke through the cliff.

THE three empty USAF ships, on automatic, shot upwards at a speed that would have squeezed their human occupants into jelly—if they had had occupants. Their tongues shot out and flailed, caught the Russian tongues, twisted shot out and flailed, caught the Russian tongues, twisted as the generators within the USAF vessels strove to outbend the Russian tongues.

Then, the American vessels rammed into the Russians, drove them upwards, flipped them over. And all six craft fell along the cliff's face, Russian and American intermingled, crashing into each other, bouncing off the sheer face, exploding, their fragments colliding, and smashed into the bottom of the canyon.

Scone did not see this, for he had completed the tongue through the tunnel, turned it off for a few seconds, and sent a video beam through. He was just in time to see the big battlebird start to float off the ground where it had been waiting. Perhaps, it had not accompanied the destroyers because of Russian contempt for American ability. Or, perhaps, because the commander was under orders not to risk the big ship unless necessary. Even now, the *Lermontov* rose slowly as if it might take two paths: over the cliff or towards the *Zemlya*. But, as it rose, Scone applied full power.

Some one, or some detecting equipment, on the *Lermontov* must have caught view of the tongue as it slid through space to intercept the battlebird. A tongue shot out towards the American beam. But Scone, in

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full and superb control, bent the axis of his beam, and the Russian missed. Then Scone's was in contact with the hull, and a hole appeared in the irradiated plastic.

Majestically, the *Lermontov* continued rising—and so cut itself almost in half. And, majestically, it fell.

Not before the Russian commander touched off all the missiles aboard his ship in a last frenzied defense, and the missiles flew out in all directions. Two hit the slope, blew off the face of the mountain on the *Lermontov*'s side, and a jet of atomic energy flamed out through the tunnel created by Scone.

But he had dropped his craft like an elevator, was halfway down the cliff before the blasts made his side of the mountain tremble.

Half an hour later, the base of Eratosthenes sued for peace. For the sake of human continuity, said Panchurin, all fighting must cease forever on the moon.

The Chinese, who had been silent up to then despite their comrades' pleas for help, also agreed to accept the policy of Nationalism.

Now, Broward expected Scone to break down, to give way to the strain. He would only have been human if he had done so.

He did not. Not, at least, in anyone's presence.

BROWARD awoke early during a sleep-period. Unable to forget the dream he had just had, he went to find Ingrid Nashdoi. She was not in her lab; her assistant told him that she had gone to the dome with Scone.

Jealous, Broward hurried there and found the two standing there and looking up at the half-Earth. Ingrid was holding a puppy in her arms. This was one of the few animals that had been taken unharmed from the shattered tanks of the fallen *Zemlya*.

Broward, looking at them, thought of the problems that faced the Moon people. There was that of government, though this seemed for the moment to be settled. But he knew that there would be more conflict between the bases and that his own promotion of the Athenian ideology would cause grave trouble.

There was also the problem of women. One woman to every three men. How would this be solved? Was there any answer other than heartaches, frustration, hate, even murder?

"I had a dream," said Broward to them. "I dreamed that we on the Moon were building a great tower which would reach up to the Earth and that was our only way to get back to Earth. But everybody spoke a different tongue, and we couldn't understand each other. Therefore, we kept putting the bricks in the

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wrong places or getting into furious but unintelligible argument about construction.

He stopped, saw they expected more, and said, "I'm sorry. That's all there was. But the moral is obvious."

"Yes," said Ingrid, stroking the head of the wriggling puppy. She looked up at Earth, close to the horizon. "The physicists say it'll be two hundred years before we can go back. Do you realize that, barring accident or war, all three of us might live to see that day? That we might return with our great-great-great-great-great-great grandchildren? And we can tell them of the Earth that was, so they will know how to build the Earth that must be."

"Two hundred years?" said Broward. "We won't be the same persons then."

But he doubted that even the centuries could change Scone. The man was made of rock. He would not bend or flow. And then Broward felt sorry for him. Scone would be a fossil, a true stone man, a petrified hero. Stone had its time and its uses. But leather also had its time.

"We'll never get back unless we do today's work every day," said Scone. "I'll worry about Earth when it's time to worry. Let's go; we've work to do."

THE END

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and some were savages

By JAMES BLISH

ILLUSTRATED BY EMSH

In the deep violet light of an alien world, the savages rode 'round and 'round, their deadly bows and arrows aimed at the space gig Conestoga. On the ground, the members of the rescue team were unaware of the supreme irony of the situation. All except one.

THE French, as it well known can cook, and so can the Italians, who taught them how. The Germans can cook, and so can the Scandanavians, and the Dutch. Greek cooking is good if you like chervil, and Armenian if you can endure lamb-fat and honey; Spanish cooking is excellent if your Spaniard can find something to cook, and the same goes for most Asiatic cuisines; and so on, thank goodness.

The cook aboard the UNSS *Brock Chisholm*, though, was an Englishman. He boiled everything. Sometimes for chow you got the things themselves, deeply jacketted in mosquito netting; and sometimes instead you got the steam condensed off them, garnished with scraps of limp lettuce which had turned black with age. The latter was sometimes called soup, and sometimes called tea.

This is just one of the hazards —one of the more usual ones—of

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interstellar pioneering; and though I've heard that things have gotten a little softer in recent years, I can't say that I've seen any signs of it. Even aboard the *Chisholm*, I was sometimes accused of making a god of my stomach, even by Capt. Motlow; which was plainly unfair, considering the quantities of steamed-shoes-in-muslin which I'd gnawed at without complaint during the first few months of the trip.

All the same, I did my best to stay on my dignity, as is expected of every officer and gentleman commissioned by act of the General Assembly.

"An army marches on its stomach," I pointed out, "and I'm supposed to be a fighting man. I don't mind servicing my own arms, or that my batman doesn't seem to know how to press a uniform, or even having to baby-tend Dr. Roche. All that's part of the normal grab-bag you get in the field. But—"

"Yah-huh," Capt. Motlow said. He was a tall narrow man, and except for his battleship prow of a chin looked as though he were leather himself. "You're also supposed to be an astrogator, Hans. Get your mind off sauerbraten and onto the problem at hand, will you?"

I looked at the planet on the screens and made a slight correction for the third moon—a tiny, jagged mass of dense rock with a retrograde movement and high eccentricity, very hard to allow for without longer observation time than we'd had up to now. Inevitably, it reminded me of something.

"I've got the problem in hand," I said stiffly, pointing to the tab board showing my figures in glowing characters. He swivelled around in his chair to look up at them. "And don't think it was easy. How long is the *Chisholm* going to last with an astrogator who hasn't had any B vitamins since he left Earth, except what I wangled out of Doc Bixby's stores? Astrogation demands steady nerves—and that hunk of rock we had last night for dinner was no more a sauerbraten than I am."

"Don't tempt me, Lieutenant Pfeiffer," Capt. Motlow said. "We may hit cannibalism enough down below. If you're *damn* sure we can put the *Chisholm* into this orbit, we'll go have our meeting with Dr. Roche. Between meals, we've got work to do."

"Certainly I'm sure," I said. Motlow nodded and turned back to push the "do-so" button. The figures vanished from the tab board into the banks, and for a while the *Chisholm* groaned and heaved as she was pushed into the orbit around our goal. That's one thing I can say for Motlow: when I told him the figures were

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right, he trusted me. He never had any reason to be sorry for it, and neither has any other captain.

All the same, he's also far from the only captain to give me the impression that field-commissioned officers *like* boiled shoes.

Dr. Armand Roche was another of my crosses aboard the *Chisholm,* but also so ordinary a feature of any UNRRA crash-rescue mission in deep space that I could hardly complain about him. Crash rescue, after all, is a general cross mankind bears—and may have to bear for some centuries yet—in payment for the poor forethought the first interstellar explorers exercised in the practice of a science called gnotobiosis.

Maybe they couldn't be blamed for that, since they had never heard of the term. It is the science of living a totally germ-free life; in other words, the most extreme form of sanitation and public health imaginable. In the first days of space travel, nobody suspected that it would eventually have to come to that. The builders of the first unmanned rockets did think to sterilize their missiles as best they could, and in fact the proposition that it would be unwise (and scientifically confusing) to contaminate other planets with Earthly life was embodied in several international agreements. But nobody thought of man himself as a contaminant until far too late.

"There were a few harbingers," Dr. Roche was telling the quiet group in the officers' mess. He was a smallish, bland-faced, rumpled man, but he spoke with considerable passion when he saw any occasion to. "In fact the very term 'gnotobiosis' goes back to the March 1959 issue of the *World Medical Journal*—one of the many important ideas the UN was spawning hand over fist in those days, to the total indifference of the world at large. Even then, somebody saw that the responsibility for introducing the TB germ, the rabies virus, the anthrax spore, the encephalitis virus to a virgin planet would be very heavy."

"I don't see why," said Sgt. Lea, the blond, loose-jointed Marine squad leader. "Everybody knows that human beings couldn't possibly catch an alien disease, or aliens catch a human one. Their body chemistries are too different."

"That's one of those things that 'everybody knows' that's wrong," Dr. Roche said, "and I see by your expression that you're quite aware of it; thanks for the leading question. I chose my examples specifically to cover that point. All the diseases I mentioned are zoonoses—that is, dis-

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eases which circulate very freely between many different types of creatures, even on Earth. Rabies will attack virtually every kind of warm-blooded animal, and pass from one phylum to another at a scratch. Most serious parasitic diseases, like bilharzia or malaria, are transmitted through phyla very remote from man—snails, armadillos, kissing bugs, goats, you name the critter and I'll pop up with a zoonosis to go with it. Diseases of man are caused by bacteria, fungi, protozoa, viruses, worms, fish, flowering plants and so on. And diseases of these creatures are caused by man."

"I never heard of a man making a plant sick," said a very young Marine private named Oberholzer.

"Then you have never met a mimosa, to name only one of a whole catalogue of examples. And even micro-organisms harmless on Earth might well prove dangerous on other soil, or in other races—which in fact is what *has* happened over and over again, and why we are in oribit around this planet now."

"We gave them measles?"

"Not funny," Dr. Roche said. "European explorers introduced measles into the Polynesian Islands, which had never known it before, and it turned out to be a massively fatal disease—for a non-immune population of adults. Columbus' expedition was probably the importer of syphilis from the West Indies into Europe, and for two centuries thereafter it cut Europeans down as rapidly and surely as gangrene; its later, chronic form didn't become characteristic of the disease until the antibodies against the organism were circulating through the population of Europe as a whole. It's possible that only one single man in Columbus' fleet was responsible for that vast epidemic mortality, and for the many additional centuries of suffering and loss and disgrace that followed before cures were found. It's a hideous kind of risk to take, but the first intersteller explorers, who should have known better, also took it—and the price is still being paid. This expedition of ours is part of that price."

"So if I sneeze on patrol," Oberholzer said, "I get KP?"

Lea glared at him. "No," he said, "you get shot. Shaddup and listen."

Lea's pique was understandable. His leading question had been designed to remind Oberholzer and any other green hands like him that we all, Dr. Roche included, had been brought up on birth-farms, and so give Roche just the opening he needed to abort such a line of questioning as Oberholzer was following.

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The sergeant did not take kindly to the failure of his rudimentary essay into dialectics.

Roche, however, explained patiently. The Earth had not been sterilized yet, and probably never would be; even now, nobody really warmed to the idea of disrupting the grand ecology of the whole home planet, simply for the protection of worlds and races many light-years away, or even still undiscovered. But the intermediate step was a fact, as Roche should not have needed to point out.

For instance, there was not a pig in any herd on Earth any more, nor had there been for centuries, who was not certified to be specific-pathogen-free, by virtue of having been born along with the rest of his litter by radical hysterectomy and raised on the bottle. And there was not a man aboard the *Chisholm*, or anywhere else in space today, who had not been from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd into a totally germ-free environment—which he still carried inside his body, and which still carried him in his ship.

On the other hand, maybe I was expecting too much of a private of Marines on his first crash-rescue mission (or for all I knew, his first mission of any kind). As I've noted, the astrogator is traditionally one of the two officers on a crash-rescue ship who are assigned to provide intellectual companionship to the UNRRA civilian in charge, the other being the ship's surgeon. The assumption behind the tradition seems to be that any other Giant Brains who might be aboard would be too busy. Well, there was some justice in that, for while an astrogator is very busy indeed when he's busy at all, it's in the nature of the job to be concentrated at the opposie ends of a trip, leaving a long dead space in between. I get a lot of reading done that way: poetry, mostly. And doctoring, of course, is a notoriously off-again on-again proposition, especially with a population as small as a ship's crew to look after, and nary a germ anywhere aboard (ideally, at least).

Hence though I had never heard Roche's speech before, I had heard many like it. Up to this point I could have given it myself, and probably played a fair game of chess at the same time. Now, however, he was getting to the part that only he could testify to: the nature of the *specific* situation beneath us on this mission.

"The first explorers who landed here called the planet Savannah, though maybe 'tundra' or 'veldt' would have been more suitable," he was saying. "It's a dense, high gravity world about seven thousand miles in diame-

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ter. It consists mostly of broad grassy plains, broken here and there by volcanic ranges, and some rather small oceans.

"However, they didn't explore it thoroughly, for reasons I'll get to in a moment. They made contact with the natives very early, and described them as savages, but friendly. No xenologist would agree that they're savages, not from the descriptions we have. They are hunters primarily, but they also herd, and raise crops. They weave, and build boats, and navigate by the stars. They are also metal-workers, technically very ingenious, but limited by the fact that they lack the energy sources to do really large scale, high temperature smelting and forging, thus far.

"They have a family system, and a system of small nations or family tribes, and a certain amount of internecine warfare in bad years. Both of these facts contributed to the downfall of the first expedition to Savannah. The Earthman inadvertently infected these initially friendly people wih a very common-Earthly disease which turned out to be virulently deadly to the males of the native population. The females are not immune, but are naturally far more resistant.

"This plague played hob with the native families, and this in turn began to threaten old alliances and balances of power between the tribes, as well as the division of labor within the tribes themselves. The natives were quick to associate it with their strange visitors, and one night, without the slightest warning, they attacked the landing camp. Very few of the landing party got away alive—and there were no wounded among them."

"Poisoned darts?" Sgt. Lea said interestedly.

"No," Dr. Roche returned grimly. "Quarrels."

Lea looked puzzled.

"Those are crossbow bolts," Roche explained. "In this case, heavy metal ones, launched with such high velocity that they can kill a man no matter where they hit him, through shock alone. I bring this up so you'll know in advance that full battle dress is going to be of dubious value at best. We are going to have to plan in such a way that nobody gets hit—and *without* killing or injuring so much as one native. Just how we're going to manage that, I'll have to leave up to you."

Lea shrugged. He was used to being handed the hard ones.

"All right. Now what we *want* to do isn't quite as complicated. We need to capture a number of natives with status among their fellows—warriors will doubtless do; learn more of their language; win their confidence; and explain to them that we have a

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cure. And we will have to convince them that they must abandon their first natural desire, which will be to give the antivirus to their sick warriors and kings. The stuff won't work with them; they're doomed. Instead, it will have to be given to expectant mothers, exclusively."

"That's going to take a lot of convincing," Capt. Motlow said.

"Agreed. But that's one of the main reasons why I'm here. Nor is that all. There's a time limit. Unlike human beings, the natives here have a fixed mating season, so all their babies go to term at once, practically speaking. We got here as fast as we could once we learned the story, but we are right on the edge of the whelping season now. If we don't get most of this generation of pregnant females injected—for which native help is imperative, we haven't the manpower to do it ourselves—the race will be wiped out. The male children will die in infancy, and that will be that.

"That's all I know about the situation, and all anybody knows. So I have to conclude: Gentlemen, you must take it from there."

A stocky middle-aged man with completely white hair—Clyde Bixby, the ship's surgeon—raised his hand. "One fact I think you skipped, Doctor," he said. "And I think it's interesting in this context. Why not tell the assembled company what the plague was?"

"Oh. Sure," Dr. Roche said. "It was tobacco mosaic."

Nobody but Doc Bixby seemed to believe him at first, and after all, Bixby had already had the benefit of the explanation—or as much of it as Dr. Roche knew. But a lot of them ground out their cigarettes like they were crushing poisonous snakes, all the same. Roche grinned.

"Don't worry," he said. "One reason tobacco mosaic is so abundant on Earth is because it's harmless to humans. And as far as tobacco growers are concerned, it can be controlled in the fields—not cured, but controlled—by streptomycin spraying."

"A curious thing in itself," Doc Bixby put in. "Streptomycin is no good at all against any other virus."

"Well, it's no more than indifferently good against mosaic, either," Dr. Roche emphasized. "But that's not important now. The point is: For the tobacco plant, mosaic is one of the most highly infectious diseases man has ever studied. The virus isn't a tiny but relatively complex organism, as most viruses that attack man and other animals are. Instead, it's a simple chemical

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compound. You can prepare it in crystal form as easily as you'd make rock salt or rock candy. It isn't alive, not until it gets into the plant cell; the life it leads thereafter is entirely 'borrowed' from the host. And it's simple enough chemically so that most reagents—physical or chemical—don't destroy its integrity.

"The result is that if you walk into a greenhouse where tobacco is growing, and you're smoking a cigarette which was made from the leaf of a plant that had had mosaic, most of the growing plants will come down with the disease. They literally contract it from the smoke. And that seems to be exactly what the Savannahans did. They picked it up from cigarettes the first explorers offered them."

"As a peace-pipe, maybe?" Bixby speculated.

"Maybe. If so, it's a great fat example of what a mess you can make by pushing an analogy too far."

"But why were they susceptible in the first place?" I asked.

Roche spread his hands. "God knows, Hans. It's just lucky for them that we know how the virus operates. It heads right for the chromosomes during cell division, and alters a set of genes in such a way that the daughter cells become susceptible to the disease in its overt or 'clinical' phase. That's why it kills off the offspring so much faster than it does the adult generation: because cell division goes on so much faster in infants."

"It sure does," Doc Bixby said. "In humans, the average is ten complete replacements of all the cells in the body per lifetime—and eight of those take place between conception and the age of two."

"Well, we can denature this virus relatively simply," Dr. Roche said. "Lucky for the Savannahans that we can—*if we can do it in time.* I think we'd better get down to business."

Sgt. Lea's expression, which had begun to look like that of an insecurely tethered balloon, turned flinty with an almost audible clink.

We came down on Savannah that night in the ship's gig, it being impossible to land the *Chisholm* on this planet or any planet. I was aboard, because it was part of my job to pilot the cranky, graceless, ungrateful landing craft. Furthermore, I had to fly her in complete blackness over terrain I knew only in vaguely general terms; and I was under orders to land her silently, which is almost impossible to do with a vessel driven solely by two rockets (for space) and two ram-jets (for air).

Sure, I wasn't going to use the rockets for landing, and I could

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cut the athodydes; but when I did that the gig dropped like a skimming stone. Though she was primarily an aircraft, she had very little lifting area, and could be said to glide only by courtesy (which certainly would be extended only by somebody watching her safely through binoculars).

Nevertheless I gave it a brave try. I wrestled her through the blackness to what seemed by the instruments to be about fifty feet above the expanse of veldt Sgt. Lea had chosen. Then I poured on enough throttle to get her well beyond aerodynamic flying speed, and cut her out, hoping to edge her still lower to the ground before she stalled out.

It worked, but it was rough. We were closer to the ground than I'd estimated, so we stalled out from what must have been no more than a few inches. Engines or no engines, it was *not* quiet—we could hear the screech of wet grass bursting into steam under the skids, right through both layers of hull.

I never touched the brakes. I didn't want us to come to a stop until we were as far away as possible from the echoes of that scream. I hate hot landings. By the time the gig actually lurched to a stop, we were twenty miles away from where we'd planned to be, and every face on board was livid—mine most of all.

I don't mind being a pioneer, exactly, but I hope some day they'll give me a softer horse. I wasn't aware of having said so aloud, but I must have, for behind me Sgt. Lea said sourly:

"The next time I have to land on a high-gravity planet, I hope they give *me* a thinner pilot."

I maintained a dignified, commissioned-officer's silence. Shortly I heard the faint rattle of gear behind me as the Marines unstrapped themselves and checked their battle dress. By this time I judged myself to be enough over the shakes to risk checking my own suit, helmet, air supply and flamer, and then the critical little device which was to be the trigger of our trap—if the trap worked. The trigger seemed to be in good order, and so did the relay assembly on my control board which was supposed to respond to it. It was Lea's job to make sure that the answering action was appropriate, and I knew I could trust him for that.

"All right, Lieutenant Pfeiffer?"

"Looks all right. Let's go."

I doused all the lights, sealed myself up, and followed the Marine squad out the airlock and down into the tall grass. I couldn't resist looking up. The sky was a deep violet, in which the stars twinkled like lightning-bugs—the kind of sight you don't often en-

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joy in a spaceman's life. I had a notion that if I stayed here long enough to become light-adapted, I might even manage to make out a few of the simpler and more banal constellations. From here, for instance, you ought to be able to make out Orion, and begin to catch distorted hints of the constellation the Sun belongs to from far away, called the Parrot. Only a computer can analyze out constellations in space; the eye can see nothing but the always visible stars, clouds and clouds of them, glaring and motionless. . . .

However, I had better sense than to daydream long on office time. I set the airlock to cycling, and touched my helmet to the closed outer seal to listen for the muted groan of the flamers. It came through right on time, a noise halfway between a low bull-fiddle note and that of a motor trying to start. Satisfied, more or less, I plodded away through the extremely tall grass.

It was lonely here. My radar sweeper kept me posted on where the gig was, and where I was supposed to go from there; but I was not going to have any company, because I was to be only one unit of a very wide circle, and the Marines were already fanning out and away from me to take up their own posts on that perimeter.

Possibly I was already being stalked, too. If so, the radar would never let me know about it, as long as the stalker kept himself bent low in the sea of grass. Above, the violet sky arched and burned. It was moonless, we had been careful enough about our timing to insure that; but there were no clouds, either. If the natives had sharp eyes, as hunters had to have, they might well see the glints of starlight on my helmet, or even on the shoulders of my suit. And I was very aware of my weight. Every step was elephantine. I had to admit to the alien night that I was not really in very good shape for a fighting man, hard though I tried to blame it all on the 1.8 Gee field.

And my flamer was locked to my suit. We were under no circumstances to use them to defend ourselvs, and couldn't have gotten them unlocked in time to disobey the order. They were only for afterwards, in case the flaming circuit inside the airlock had been knocked out for some reason. As weapons, they were as useless tonight as a tightly laced boot.

After at least a thousand million increasingly ponderous, sweating steps, the PPI scope told me I had walked out the prescribed two-and-a-half miles. I switched to re-broadcast, and got the picture as the gig saw it.

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My set had a few pips that might have been Marines, but it was impossible for my suit sweeper to see all around the circle. On repeat from the gig, the scope showed several men still coming into line on the far side, which gratified me for no reason I could pin down.

They straggled in, and then each pip in the circle turned red, one by one, showing me that they too were now getting the rebroadcast and hence were aware of where all the rest of us were. I ran a nose-count: . . . ten, eleven, and twelve counting me. Okay.

So far, no sign of savages. But they too were present and accounted for. The radar didn't show them, and neither by eye nor by sniperscope could I see anything more than the night and the waves going over the grass. But Dr. Roche had assured us that they would be there—and games theory penetrates the strategic night far better than any sensing instrument, alive or dead.

I cut out of the rebroadcast and cut in again, making my own pip blink green for a moment. At once, all eleven other pips went green and stayed that way. They had seen the warning.

It was time for human vision.

I snapped shut the lock-switch on my little device. The gig came glaring into blue-white, almost intolerable existence in the middle of our circle. A triplet of star-shells stitched across the sky above her. I could almost read the hateful legend on her side.

And there were the savages.

For those crucial three seconds they sat transfixed on their six-legged mounts, knees clenched across pommels, disproportionately long spines stiff, long bald heads thrown back, staring up at the star-shells. The hairy, brown, cruelly-beaked creatures they were sitting on stared too, stretching out necks as long as those of camels.

There were four of them inside my part of the circle. One was so near that I could even see that his skin, though bright yellow-red predominantly, had a faint greenish cast. He was barefoot, but he was wearing rough cloth, and a metallic belt with clear shadowings of totemistic designs worked into it.

Of course I can't vouch for the veracity of the colors I saw. Star-shell light is lurid and chemical; and I had been in darkness a long time before it burst over all this. But the colors, true or not, were vivid after long blackness.

I also saw the crossbow, loaded and cocked; and the quiver full of quarrels. If he were to turn and see me, hardly ten yards away from him, and as rooted to the ground as a melting snowman—

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But the shells dimmed and fell, leaving behind rapidly fading trails which twisted and flowed almost horizontally into the jet-stream aloft before they vanished. Precisely three seconds later, all the gig's searchlights went on, right here on the ground.

The long, rounded heads snapped down. At the same time the beasts screamed and leapt so high that they seemed all at once to be flying.

They charged the gig without a moment's hesitation. They were a wild and impossibly moving sight. At a full gallop the llama-like hexapods seemed to soar over the grass almost all the way, passing above the veldt in long graceful undulations like flurries of night wind. The savages bestrode them easily, just over the beasts' middle pelvis, high-stirruped but without reins and indeed far too far from the slashing screaming heads to make reins even possible—rode so easily that in silhouette, savage and beast flowed into one teratological myth, like Siamese-twin centaurs. The front horse-and-head was for leaping and screaming. The back one, merged with it, was for winding and firing the arablast. The leaping was beautiful; the screaming was fearful—and the bowmen didn't miss.

One of the port lights went out, and then the other. For a few seconds I could see the two farthest riders on my side in the glow of one of the starboard lamps, and then that was gone too. They had a little more trouble with the sweep searchlight atop the gig, which was just forward of the vertical stabilizer and slightly protected both by its motion and by the curve of the fuselage. But they got it, and they got it the hard way: they shot at its junction with the hull every time it looked away from one or another of them, and after that had jammed it to a standstill, one more quarrel at point-blank range blinded it for good.

Blackness. Worse than blackness, for it was swimming with amoeboid purple after-images.

I stood where I was, certain that by now I had sunk into the soil almost up to my waist. After I thought I might be able to see the PPI scope again. I tried to get a re-broadcast from the gig, though I was pretty sure most of the savages would now be protected from that kind of spotting by being in the lee of the hull. But as it turned out, I didn't even get a scanning sweep. Evidently they had shot off the antennae, too, the instant they had gotten close enough to see that they rotated. If it moves, shoot it!

So I waited. There was nothing else to do. Roche had been right thus far, in general at least

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and so the next step was to be dictated strictly by the clock. After the fury and beauty of the attack, this second wait seemed to go on forever. I have been in ground battles before, battles in which I was in more danger and had more to do, battles in which I had to defend myself, and did; but I have never seen anything like that attack on Savannah, and never hope to again.

Inside one of the purple splotches, I saw the word CONESTOGA in wavering white letters. It made me grind my teeth. As Roche had said, there was such a thing as pushing an analogy too far. But the worst of it was, nobody on *this* mission had so pushed it. It had just been somebody else's feeble joke—and it turned out to be horribly, entirely appropriate.

My clock went out. Time to start slogging back. It took an eternity, but at least I gradually got back my sight of the stars. At half a mile away from the gig, I reluctantly had to give that up again. I touched the gadget, and the gig responded with a fourth star-shell.

Most of the beasts were loose and grazing. There were two savages on guard outside the gig, holding their mounts, one at her needle nose, the other by the airlock. At this distance Sgt. Lea's men had no trouble gassing them both. When I touched the gadget still a third time, the gig let loose with a twenty-decibel, wavering honk which catapulted the remaining hexapods for the horizon as though they had never been domesticated at all. I resented it, a little. Dammit, couldn't Roche have been a *little* bit wrong?

But he wasn't, not then. The other six savages were inside the gig, as soundly gassed at my signal as their two guards had been by the Marines' grenades. They had been wrecking things, but hadn't had time to get past the fragile, hyperactive dummies Roche had had us set up for them to wreck. Nor had they gotten beyond the dummy chamber into the sterile areas of the ship, where the business is conducted. We stacked them right there according to directions and sealed them in. Then we flamed each other off and sealed ourselves in.

It didn't do us much good. There were no less than sixty-four cross-bow-bolt heads sticking through the inner wall of the gig. Not one savage could have missed it more than twice. We seared them off and slapped patches over the remains of the holes, but we had to go back to the *Chisholm* inside our suits. The gig was airtight again; but gnotobiotically, she had been breached, and thoroughly.

Roche had her destroyed, except for the dummy chamber

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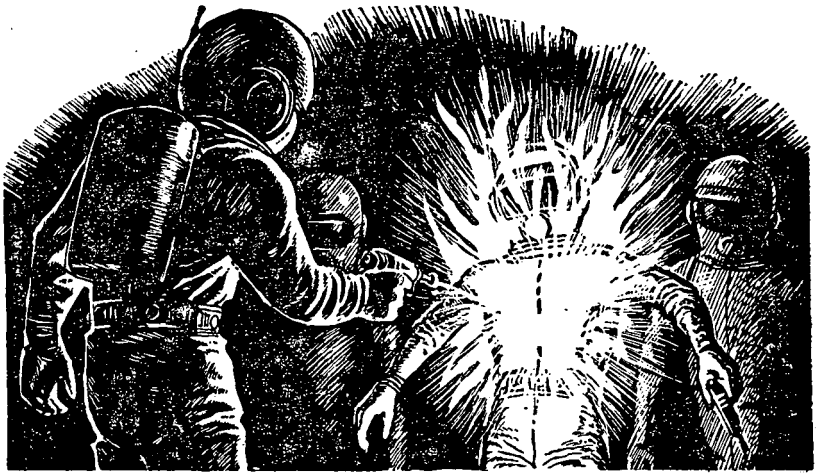

where the sleeping savages were, before he would let any one of us back into the *Chisholm* and again, I think he had planned all along to do exactly that. It was all right with me; I hated the CONESTOGA. The trouble is, I can't forget her—or rather, I can't forget her name. It's stupid to have the memory of a great affair marred by something so small—like the food, Capt. Motlow would say—but I can't help that. It's the way I remember it.

Besides, it wasn't so small, after all.

We had lost all the rest of the night sealing up the holes the arrows had made, and damned near didn't make rendezvous at all; but Roche didn't seem to worry about that. When we had finally been flamed and destroyed clean enough to satisfy him, and Lea and I were let into the control cabin of the *Chrisholm*, he barely groused at us at all. He was watching the films—not for the first time even this soon, I could see—and he looked sick. Capt. Motlow was transparently puzzled, and also annoyed. Both of them were too busy to speak to us, which made me furious, and made Lea look more and more like the front side of the Mountains of Mitchell on Mars before the cap thaws.

"There is something about this situation that's all wrong," Dr. Roche said at last, mostly to himself. "And yet I can't quite put my finger on it."

"Everything was on schedule," Lea said shortly. I gathered that he felt he was being criticized.

"Yes, yes, it's not that. They responded to the stimuli exactly as you'd expect people in his

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kind of a culture to do. The games equations fail only when you haven't enough data about the enemy to fill in the parameters."

Sgt. Lea wore the expression of a Marine who suspects, quite rightly, that his own role in the action was being dismissed as also just part of the equations. Roche didn't notice.

"No, this isn't a question of behavior. At least, I don't think it is. The trouble is, I don't know what it *is* a question of." He turned away from the screen as Bixby came in. "Ah. You were watching the action. Did you notice anything—peculiar? Would you like to see the films?"

"No," Doc Bixby said. He too was wearing a very odd expression. "I know what you're talking about, and I know the answer, too. I've just been examining the patients. They're conscious and in good shape, so whenever you're ready to talk to them—"

"I'm ready now," Roche said, getting up. "But I'd better know what it is I'm missing. Please explain."

"It's a question of evolution," Doc Bixby said. "By what possible course of selection and mutation can a four-limbed vertebrate occupy the same planet as a six-legged one?"

Roche was stunned. He drew a long, slow breath.

"That's it," he said finally. "That's what I am looking at that threw me. I was looking at it, but I wasn' seeing it. The long torsos! They've got vestigal middle limbs folded under their clothing! Is that it?"

"Yes," Doc Bixby said. "Only they aren't vestigal. They're functional."

"Interesting. Well, I'm glad that's cleared up—I was afraid it was going to turn out to be something that made a difference."

"It does," Doc Bixby said. His expression was still very strange. Roche shot him a quick glance and hurried out toward the recovery room. Lea and the surgeon followed.

I stayed where I was for a while. I had to set up a departure orbit sooner or later, and it might as well be now. It would keep me occupied during the dry period of the interviewing, while Roche was perfecting his command of the language. Current heuristics can get a man through a language in about eight hours, but it's a deadly technical process, an ordeal to the student and absolutely unendurable to the bystander.

Capt. Motlow watched my admittedly unusual display of forehandedness with considerable suspicion, but for once I didn't care. Doc Bixby's discovery may have resolved what had been bothering Dr. Roche—though

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from Bixby's expression it looked like Roche was due another discombobulation sooner or later—but it hadn't gotten past what was bothering me. That was the CONESTOGA business, of course.

As I have mentioned, the name came about by an accident unrelated to the Savannah affair. Ship's boats ordinarily aren't named at all, unless they bear the name of the parent ship. But when the *Chisholm* was on her shakedown cruise, some junior officer had made a joke about "hitting the Chisholm Trail"; and somebody else had remembered that the Conestoga wagon had been a machine with large, broad-rimmed wheels which had been specifically designed to ride well over soft soil.

And that's what a ship's gig is: a vessel designed to ride well in an atmosphere, not in a hard vacuum; it's essentially an airplane, not a spaceship. So they named the gig CONESTOGA; and after a while they got tired of it, as anyone tires of a joke that comes up again every time you look at a commonplace object, and forgot about it. But here it was back again.

Why did this bother me? I couldn't say. Partly, I suppose, because the *Chisholm* herself wasn't named after the Chisholm Trail, but after the first director of the World Medical Association, and perhaps the greatest. But that wasn't all; there was something else. And like Dr. Roche, I couldn't put my finger on it.

And even if I could, there would be nothing I could do about it. I was only an astrogator—and even if I had been Dr. Roche, the thing I was bothered about was too far in the past to be corrected, even by the theory of games.

So I thought; but like most people, I underestimated the viability of the past, the one thing the poets have been trying to pound into our corporate pinheads since words were invented:

> *We learn from words, but never learn much more than that from time to time the same things happen.*

But I wasn't then thinking about *The Folded and the Quiet;* the quotation didn't become attached to the Savannah affair in my mind until long afterward, when I encountered the poem during one of my dead-space reading jags. Now, I didn't really know what was the matter, and so all I could do was to continue to set up the tab board.

I missed the chow whistle, too. Capt. Motlow had to send up an orderly to fetch me.

Dr. Roche's patience was phenomenal, especially when you remembered the pressure of ur-

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gency under which he was laboring. Once he was able to talk to his eight charges with some facility, he did try at once to explain the situation to them. But it turned out that they were not in any mood to listen.

Nor could I blame them. After all, they were in the tank, which provided though it was with every need Roche had been able to anticipate, was still utterly unlike any environment they had ever imagined, let alone encountered. As for Dr. Roche himself, he was to them a grossly magnified face on a wall—a face like those of the demons who had brought the plague in the first place, but huge and with a huge disembodied voice to go with it. Roche was careful not to let any of the rest of us—the subsidiary demons—go drifting across the background of the screen, but it seemed to be too late for such precautions. The savages had already decided that they had been taken into the Underworld. They stood silently with their visible pairs of arms folded across their narrow chests, looking with sullen dignity into the face of the arch-demon, waiting for judgment. They would not respond to any question except by giving their names, in a rapid rattle which went right around the circle, always in the same direction:

"Ukimfaa, Mwenzio, Kwa, Jua, Naye, Atakufaa, Kwa, Mvua."

Dr. Roche spoke briefly, was greeted by more silence, and turned the screen off, mopping his brow. "A stubborn lot," he said. "I expected it, but—I can't seem to get through it."

"Two of them have the same names," Doc Bixby noted.

"Yes, sure. They're all related—a clan, which is also a squad. 'Kwa' means 'if-then'; signifies that they're bound to each other, by blood and duty. That's the trouble."

"Do all the other names mean something too?" I asked.

"Yes, of course. Standard for this kind of society. The total makes up the squad, the functional fighting unit. But I don't have nearly enough data to work out the meanings of the connections. If I did, I could figure out which one of them is senior to the others, and concentrate on him. As it is, all I'm sure of is that neither Kwa can be; that's obviously a cousin-cousin crossover."

I almost didn't ask the next question. After all, I didn't know the language, and Dr. Roche did. But since he was obviously stumped, I couldn't see what harm it would do to introduce a little noise into the situation.

"Could it be grammatical? The connection, I mean?"

"What? Certainly not. No culture of this. . . . Uh. Wait a minute. Why did you ask that, Hans?"

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"Well, because they always name themselves in the same order. I thought just maybe, if the names all mean something, it might make up a sentence."

Roche bit his lip gently. After a few seconds, he said: "That's true, dammit. It does. It's condensed, though. Wait a minute."

He pulled a pad to him and wrote, very slowly and with the utmost effort; and then stared at what he had written.

"It says: RAINY SEASON/SOMEONE/ HELP/ HIM/ IF-THEN/ DRY SEASON/MAYBE/YOU. By God, it's—"

"The Golden Rule," Doc Bixby said softly. "Games theory: nonzero-sum theorem one."

"More than that. No, not more than that, but more useful to us right now. All these words are related, you see. You can't show that in English, but Savannahan is a highly inflected language; each of these eight words stands in a precise heirarchical relationship to all the other seven. The only grammatically unique word is 'help'; the others are duplicates, either in meaning or in function."

He took a deep breath and snapped the screen back on.

"MWENZIO!" he shouted into the tank.

One of the tall tubular torsos stood abruptly as straight as a ramrod and came forward, the bullet head exalted.

"Mpo-kuseya," the savage cried, and waited.

"What's that mean?" Bixby whispered, off-stage. It was a gross violation of Roche's rules, but Roche himself could not resist whispering back.

"It means: *I cannot fail.*"

The savage and the UNRRA man stared at each other, as intently as though they were face to face, instead of watching images of each other. Then Roche began to speak once more, and now his urgency showed through at last.

I doubt that I could have followed him and Mwenzio even if I'd known the language; but I know now how it went, from the transcripts:

"Warrior, I charge you hear me, for the love of your children who may be kings. We have not come into the world to condemn. We have come to help."

"That is my name, demon."

"Then I bind you by it, for your children's sake."

"I am conquered," Mwenzio said. "Sorcery is sorcery; I bow the head. But my children are not yours to command, nor ever shall be."

"I promise you, in the name of your name, that I seek no such thing. It is the ill that I brought before that I come here to undo. To this I bind myself by my own name."

Both Capt. Motlow and Doc

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Bixby stiffened at Roche's assumption of blame for what the first expedition had done, but Roche sensed it at once and drove them back with a slashing gesture, just below the level of the screen. Mwenzio said:

"What may I call you?"

"Mbote." ["Life."]

"Lokuta te?" ["This is no lie?"]

"Lokuta te, Mwenzio."

There was a long silence. Mwenzio stood still, with head bowed. Finally he said:

"Notice me, Mbote, your servant."

"Then it is this. I have told you of the plague and what needs to be done to combat it. Credit me now, for the time is very short. We will release you and all your clan, and you must carry the word to all the tribes and kingdoms. You must persuade your kings and chieftains that those who brought the plague have come back with the cure, but only if all do exactly as we say it must be done. Above all, it must start at once, before the children are born. It would be best if all the mothers in the area where we put you down, all that can reach it by hard riding, should come to us."

"As we have done," Mwenzio said. "But then it is already too late."

"No, it can't be. Not for everyone. If we make haste—"

"No one can make haste backwards," Mwenzio said, and with a quick motion the short arms crossed above the bullet head, pulled the rough shirt up and off, and threw it to the floor of the tank. Without any visible signal, the other seven warriors shucked their shirts too, at the same moment.

In the cradle of each middle pair of arms, held low and flat across each narrow ventrum, six to eight Savannahan cubs squirmed over each other in a blind, brainless fury of nursing. They were about the size of chipmunks.

"We are the mothers," the warrior said. "And here are our children. They are already born. If it is not too late, then we give them to you, Mbote; cure them."

Nobody can know everything. The data about the Savannahans which the remains of the first expedition had brought back were reasonably complete—good enough to let Dr. Roche fill the parameters of his equations almost completely. But only almost. The first expedition hadn't been on Savannah long enough before the explosion to find out that the savages were six-limbed, let alone that the women were the warrior caste. As for us, we were culpable too—Doc Bixby most of all, for he had known the essential biologi-

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cal facts before Roche did, and had been keeping them to himself for the simple stupid pleasure of seeing Roche's face turn grey when the truth came out. I had felt that impulse myself now and then on Savannah, as I've already confessed, but I never did understand why the surgeon let it drive him—and all of us—so close to the rim of disaster. Roche only irritated me by being so knowing; but Bixby must really have hated him.

Bixby isn't with us any more, so I can't ask questions. Luckily for him, he had a great deal more up his sleeve than a simple surprise; otherwise he might have lost his license, as well as being transferred, when the *Chisholm* got home. He took only a moment or so to savor Dr. Roche's shock and despair, and then said, loud enough for the savages to hear him (though not to understand him, because he said it in English):

"It's all right. The cubs are born as far as the savages are concerned, but medically they won't be born for another month yet."

"What do you mean?" Roche said. "Dammit, Clyde, you'll pay for this. If you'd spoken earlier—"

"I spoke soon enough," Doc Bixby said, but he retreated a little from the savagery in Roche's voice. "The cubs are embryologically immature, that's all. From the point of view of development, they're still fetuses. They seem to get born as soon as they can control their muscles, and then they crawl up into the dam's arms to be nursed the rest of the way to 'term'—like marsupials on Earth. I knew it would be that way as soon as I realized that these creatures had to have two functional pelvic girdles. If those bones are to be in balance well enough to serve as fulcrums for *two* pairs of hind limbs—and you can see that that's what the original situation was by looking at the 'horses'—then neither of them could simultaneously be flexible enough to pass a full-term cub. It was much more likely that they littered very early and maintained the whelps *outside* the womb until they reached term. They probably have many more children than they ever manage to raise; the weak ones just don't manage to make it into the nursing arms, and fall off to die. A good system for selecting out weak sisters—brutal for the spawn, but kind to the race. That's evolution for you every time."

"Very like the marsupials," Roche said in a flat, quiet voice.

"Yes, just as I said."

"What did evolution ever do for the marsupials? Opossums and kangaroos are notably inefficient animals. They've shucked

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off their weak sisters that way for millions of years and still they're no better equipped to survive than they ever were! But never mind, we can't change that. What I want to know is, can we still immunize these cubs? Are they still unborn in *that* sense? In short, Clyde, now that your practical joke is over—*is there still time?* I've made promises. Can I keep them?"

"I didn't. . . . Sure you can. I took blood samples and ran antibody titers on one of the cubs when I first discovered this. They're naturally immune until they're 'born'; they're getting the appropriate beta-globulins from their mothers' milk. You can save them."

"No thanks to you," Roche said in a raw, ragged whisper.

"No," Bixby said. Abruptly, he looked quite haggard. "I suppose not. All I can say is, I would have spoken before you promised anything if it had really been too late. But there is still time."

In the tank, the warriors held out their children.

It went very well after that, all things considered. By the time we left, the plague was greatly slowed down, and Roche and the computer between them were convinced that it would cease to be an important pandemic on Savannah not long after the *Chisholm* left. It wouldn't be exterminated, of course. Now that it had been established in so many living ceils, the virus would be passed on from generation to generation, protected in its intracellular environment from any possible concentration of antibodies circulating in the extracellular fluids of the body. But by that same token, this chronic infection would keep the antibody titers high, and prevent the virus from causing any overt illness. The immunity would stick, which was what we had sought, and what we brought about.

It was over.

Except that I have come up at last with what it was that had been bothering me the whole time. And it was not just a fantasm, not just a crochet. It was real, and came crawling into my head in all its unavoidable dread and revulsion at the moment that I opened my new orders, and found that I was again assigned to be the astrogator of the *Chisholm.*

At that instant, I remembered that the Conestoga wagon was the machine that brought tuberculosis to the Indians . . . and the orders say that we are on our way back to Savannah.

THE END

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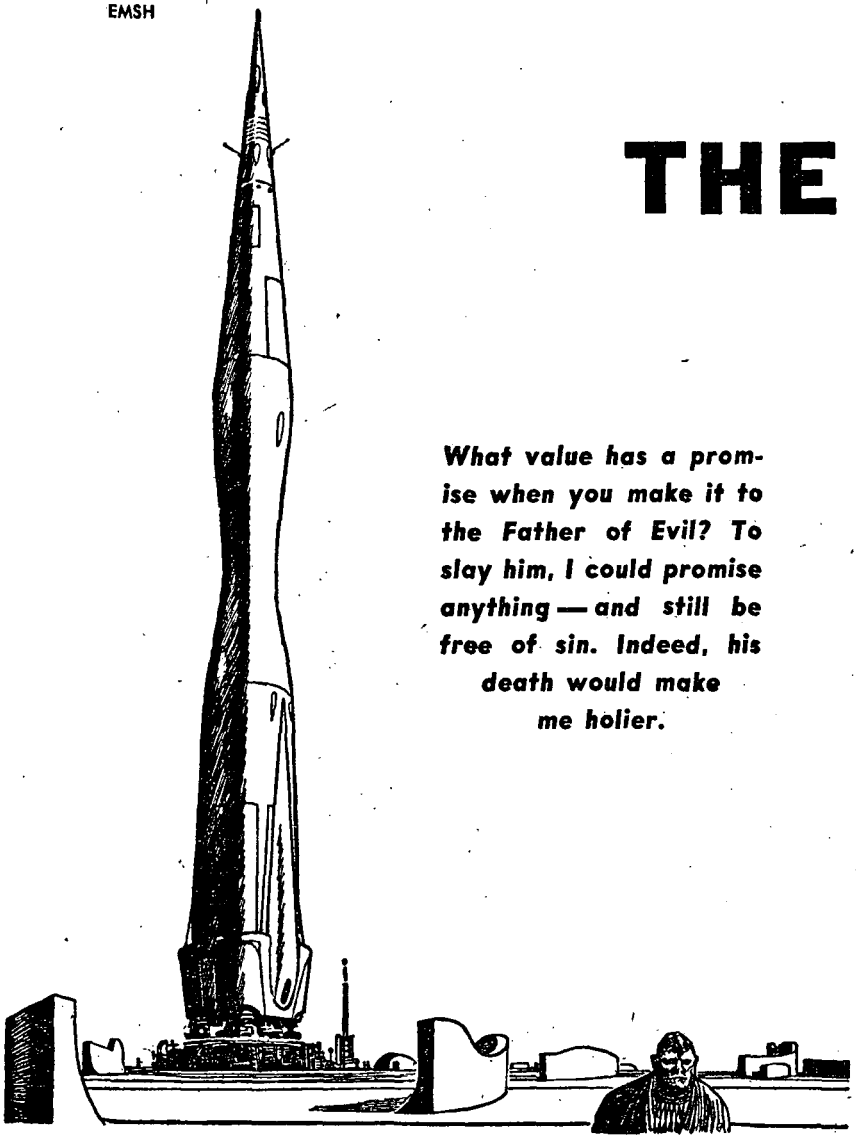
What value has a promise when you make it to the Father of Evil? To slay him, I could promise anything — and still be free of sin. Indeed, his death would make me holier.



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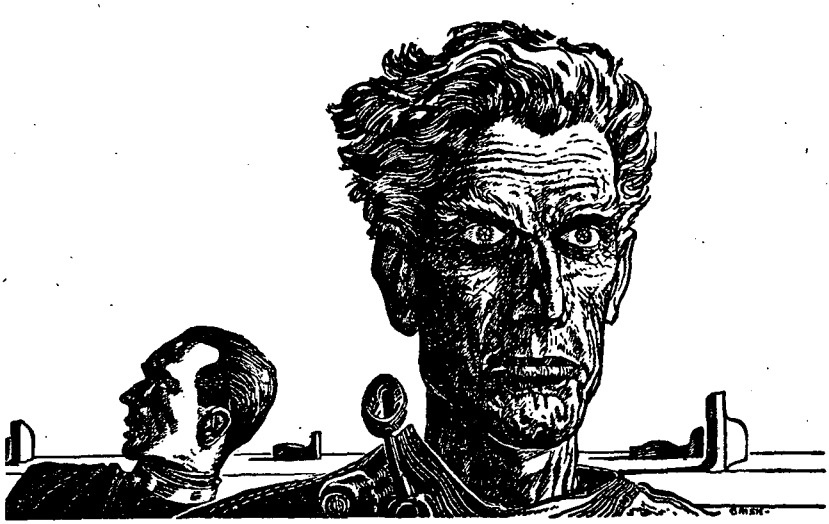
MISSIONARY

By J. F. BONE

MY LEG itched. The knitting fracture beneath the cast was letting me know in no uncertain terms that a simple fracture is simple in name only. There is nothing like a nagging, unscratchable itch. It doesn't really hurt, but after awhile it can become unadulterated torture, —and all you can do is grin and



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bear it. Ultimately you stop grinning.

To make matters worse, I had Wolverton for company. Zard knows, I despised the man enough before I saw him and contact had only served to change my dislike to active loathing.

He sat across from me, draped bonelessly in the contoured comfort of a Varkhide chair fashioned for him by one of his Halsite retainers—a tall, angular man of indeterminate age, sandy-haired, lean-cheeked, beak-nosed, with piercing yellow eyes that flashed golden under tufted brows. His face was leathery and hatched with innumerable fine wrinkles, but his eyes and voice were young.

To give the devil his due, he had a wonderful voice—cajoling, persuasive, domineering and demanding. He could use it with all the skill and passionate conviction of a Bearer of the Word. His tongue was a weapon—a club and a rapier—and I had been pounded and pierced with it for nearly two weeks. I hated it, but I had to listen for I was literally a captive audience.

"As I was saying last time," Wolverton continued, "rabbits have nothing on the human race. Given a halfway favorable opportunity and sufficient time, humanity can make a planet look like the Australian bush. Men don't understand it until it's too late—and then, stifled by their own swarm, they either degenerate or strike out to find a new world where a man can breathe. Always they go in pairs—male and female—and pretty soon another world becomes another rabbit warren."

"What's a rabbit?" I asked.

Wolverton looked at me and laughed. "It's obvious you've never been on the Inner Worlds, have you?"

I shook my head. "I am an Adept," I said. "I am satisfied here in Promised Land."

"Thought so. You wouldn't be asking about rabbits if you had. The early colonists took them along as food animals, —and it's touch and go whether men or rabbits are the dominant species on some planets."

He didn't explain any further, but I got the general idea.

"But that isn't the point," Wolverton went on, his voice mellow and persuasive. "Rabbits maintain a fairly balanced ecology because they're more subject to natural forces which we humans ignore or circumvent. We change environment to meet our needs—and in those rare instances where environment changes us, we adapt to it and change ourselves. Take Samar for example, normally a human being is monogamous either by nature or by law—but what

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happens when women outnumber men?"

I stiffened. I had heard of Samar from traders and from the Word itself. "Samar," I said, "is a disgrace—a sink of iniquity—a foul blot upon the face—"

"Oh stop it," he said wearily. "You can't blame environmental forces. Nor can you blame men for adapting to them. Sure, you can point with holy horror at Samarian social customs, but even so, they aren't as bad as your ancestors'. They don't murder excess girls."

"They should," I retorted brutally. "The old days were harsh, but they were necessary. One man must cleave to one mate. The Word demands it. Polygamy must be stamped out at the source if Faith is to survive.

"But it did no good population-wise," Wolverton said. "You're now exceeding safe growth limits for your territories. That's why you want mine."

"Lies," I muttered.

"Not at all. And you know it. Your people already *want* my land. Soon you will *need* it. And in a few centuries, *you won't be able to exist without it!!* His voice was flat with certainty.

"Lies," I said, but my voice wasn't as certain as his. I had seen the crowding in the towns and fields of Promised Land, and we *did* need Wolverton's Holding to absorb good farmers who had no land to farm. Wolverton was right about that. We had lived up our naturally tillable acreage and reclamation projects were slow to provide needed soil. Deviants were already appearing who defied the Word by advocating birth control. Yet the Word said, *"Be fruitful and replenish the land."*

"Back in the Dark Ages on a planet known as Earth," Wolverton went on inexorably, "a man named Malthus predicted our birth rate would fight a losing battle with famine. So far we have managed to avoid it by laws, by finding new frontiers, and by improving food technology. But laws and technology can only retard the growth, and frontiers are getting even harder to find. Time is catching up with us."

"I don't see—", I said. Wolverton looked at me grimly. "I know you don't," he said. "I haven't made the slightest impression."

"You've made an impression, all right," I assured him with equal grimness.

He shrugged. "There are all kinds of impressions," he commented wryly, "and not all of them are good."

"Yours has not been," I said boldly. "I place my trust in Zard, not in the voice of Evil."

"That blank, sanctimonious

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stare!" he said acidly. "You Worders—gah! You're so filled with catechism and cant that you won't see a fact if it hits you in the face. Of all the possibilities on this benighted planet, the one with all the proper qualities turns out to be mentally defective." He glared at me. "I don't know why I waste my time. Ordinarily I'd condition you and let it go at that."

"But you won't," I said confidently.

He winced and I smiled. It wasn't often that I won an advantage over him, and the taste of it was sweet in my mouth.

"The power of Faith," I said sententiously, "is the greatest force in the universe. It even restrains you."

He looked at me with the pitying contempt an adult has for a not-too-bright child. "What you need is an education," he said slowly. "You've never had a chance."

I groaned inwardly. Always he tried to shake my faith—but he had failed before and would fail again for my course was unalterably clear. *"Avoid the smooth tongue of Evil lest ye lose your immortal soul. For the Evil will come to judgment—and the tortures of Hell are everlasting."* So said Zard in the days of his Teaching—and so we all believed. The Word of Zard was more than a symbol. It was a way of life, and Promised Land had bloomed and flowered under it.

Admittedly I was ignorant of the heathenish jargon Wolverton advanced. I knew nothing of nucleonics, spaceways, genetic factors, chromosome patterns, economics or sociology. Nor did I care. Our people had known it once but they had passed it by as childish—as men put aside the games of children. For us there was the Word. For did not Zard write in letters of fire upon the riven rock, *"Be steadfast in thy faith. Fix thine eyes upon the joys of heaven and abjure Evil. For the Faithful Man is a bright beam in the Almighty's eye and naught shall harm him who walks the fourfold path of Righteousness.* Zard's words were comfort. Wolverton's were pain. I was thrice thankful I had learned the Word. It was so much a part of me that not even Wolverton could shake my belief. I was strong—in faith and in will. For I was an Adept—next only to a Bearer of the Word.

Wolverton with his machines could contain my powers—but that was all. He could not capture my soul. And that was what he wanted. My body was useless to him. He had many bodies of flesh and metal to serve him, but none had my powers to seek into the hearts of men, to know their inmost thoughts, to bring things

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to me by the power Zard had given. To kill, if need be.

It was because of my powers that I was here, nursing a broken leg, helpless in the house of the Father of Evil, a prisoner of a primitive idol worshipper who exalted his machines above the Word.

Wolverton eyed me speculatively. "If you would get the idea through your thick head that you are eventually going to join me—that you are *not* going to leave here until you do—that you are going to see things as they really are and not as you wish they were—we'd both have an easier time and I wouldn't be forced to keep a Halsite watching you, or waste power blanketing this place with ultra frequencies. But if I have to take ten years to pick the scales off your eyes one by one, I'll still do it and count it time well spent. You see, you are unique. There's no one quite like you anywhere in the known Universe—and what's more, you are necessary."

I laughed at him and rejoiced in the black anger which came to his face. Then the lines smoothed and the hard glitter vanished from his golden eyes—and again I was afraid. Not for myself, but for my soul.

"Well, let's try again," Wolverton said with forced cheerfulness.

I tried to find his true meaning—but he was blank—a smooth, cold-hard surface which I could not penetrate. Not like the others. They were soft and fuzzy. Their pictures were not clear—distorted—wavering—unreal, but that was due to Wolverton's machines. I could not communicate with them, but I couldn't even *reach* Wolverton. And as usual, my failure increased my determination. He was inhuman, a soulless monster, blacker than the Pit of Night. The Bearers were right. Promised Land would never be safe until we were finally rid of him. Wolverton must die.

But Wolverton was not dead. He survived and prospered. His Halsite mercenaries guarded his island Holding—and the broad reaches of his lands, innocent of the plow, were as lush and untamed as they had been in the days of the first-comers.

The followers of the Word could gain no foothold on his lands—for behind Wolverton was the might of his machines, which men could neither influence nor withstand. Wolverton's ancestor had found this world, and therefore the Holding was his—half a million square miles of island kingdom that cried in darkness for the Word. The fierce Halsites Wolverton employed and the hidden telltales scattered through his lands inevitably found trespassers and most

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of these were promptly and urgently returned to Promised Land. But not all. Adepts who tried to kill him never returned.

It was infuriating. It was a disgrace to our world. It was intolerable. And so it was that I had volunteerd to kill Wolverton with an ancient weapon of horrid power, and in the bright cleansing flame of the explosion purge our world forever of the face of Evil.

But Evil, it seemed, was not defenseless. High as I was—I was seen from below and a flaming lance of power reached up from the forest to touch me, —and I fell. In shameful cowardice I dropped the Weapon without setting the detonator.

Hurtling down to certain death, I berated myself and swore a mighty oath on Zard's bones never again to give way to weakness of the flesh if I were permitted to survive. For it was borne upon me as I fell toward the rocky ground below that I had never really expected to die despite my proud boasts of sacrifice.

And Zard heard my prayer and was merciful—yet tempered his mercy with a stern reminder of his power. For although I recovered enough control to break the force of my descent, I did not escape completely. I did not die on the cruel rocks, but as punishment for my sins of pride and cowardice, my right leg was snapped between ankle and knee—a reminder that while Zard was merciful, he was also just and meted out punishment when it was deserved.

A Halsite found me an hour later—faint and weak with pain and shock. I could not reach him as he advanced upon me warily. But his fierce crest flattened back upon his head when he saw my helplessness and his yellow fangs bared in a travesty of a human grin as he came forward with gliding steps, lifted me in his huge arms, and ran with catlike leaps down the mountainside. My weight was nothing to him, nor was the pain of my broken leg. At the third dizzy leap and jarring landing, I fainted and knew no more until I opened my eyes and saw Wolverton.

I was lying on a couch in a small inner courtyard. Around me towered his fabulous stronghold—a mighty pile of metal and stone anchored to the top of a hill, bristling with structures of metal and weird spiderwork fabrications that rotated endlessly on gimbals. My head was filled with buzzings and dizzy pinwheels of color as he bent over me and examined my torn and dirty sacramental robe. "Hmm—an Adept," he said—"Wonder what you're adept at?". He

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chuckled. "You're lucky that my boy obeyed orders and brought you in. You had no business over my land. And judging from that bomb you were towing, you were loaded for bear."

I looked at him curiously. "What's a bear?" I asked.

"It's a—" he stopped abruptly and scowled. "You're pulling my leg," he accused.

"I am *not!*" I said firmly. "I haven't touched your leg, although you have broken mine."

He winced. "I asked for that," he said. "I mean, you were carrying an Atomic."

I nodded. "I was," I said calmly, "and if it hadn't been for that Halsite—"

"You wouldn't have done anything except destroy yourself," he interrupted. "This place is shielded like a Base Fortress. But I didn't want you dead," he chuckled. "You're more useful alive."

I choked back a gasp of pain.

He noticed it. "Well," he said, "let's have a look at you." He gestured at the Halsite. The humanoid produced a long knife, and slit through my tight underdrawers, exposing my leg from ankle to thigh. The shame of it was almost more than I could bear. Wolverton looked, whistled through his teeth, and turned to the Halsite.

"Fetch doctor," he said.

The humanoid grinned, flapped his ears in acknowledgment, and disappeared into the dark interior of the pile with a catlike bound.

And presently he came back with the doctor. She was an apostate, the barred, tattooed circle of the Faith still visible on her right wrist—a natural blonde—big-boned and graceful—carrying a small medikit. She set it down, opened it, took out a fluoroprobe and examined my leg, ignoring my ritual gesture of abomination.

Her diagnosis was swift and impersonal. "Transverse fracture of the tibia and fibula," she said. "No complications. Probably it will be difficult to set since the leg muscles are so well developed, but it should heal within two weeks under stimuray."

I was embarrassed. To be examined by a female, and an apostate at that, was bad enough, but to hear the diagnosis spoken so plainly was unbearable.

I retched violently—and it wasn't entirely a ritual spasm.

Wolverton chuckled as he turned to the doctor. "This one's a *real* hardshell," he said. "Better check for psi potential when you get back to the infirmary—we don't want to get caught with our pants down like we did last time." He laughed—a high-pitched cackle that grated on my

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nerves and turned to face me. "Don't worry," he went on. "You will get used to doc. You'll have to. She's the only medic we have."

The doctor looked at me with complete distaste.

"Do your worst," I said bitterly. "After your unclean hands have touched me, I can stand anything."

"I'll do my best—even for *you!*" the doctor said. She looked into my eyes until her own slid aside from the force of my superior will. "You probably *can* stand anything—and possibly even more," she admitted grudgingly. She gestured to the Halsite who picked me up as though I were a child and carried me into the building down corridors, past courtyards and fountains to a small white room where he laid me on a table and held me while the doctor set my leg—ignoring my flinching revulsion to her touch.

So that was how I came to be seated in a wheelchair with a Halsite at my back, listening to Wolverton's voice—the Voice of Evil. The Halsite who attended me scratched idly at an insect bite on one massive arm and eyed me speculatively. But I had seen quite a few Halsites these past two weeks and so I didn't feel particularly disturbed. My itching leg occupied most of my attention.

Wolverton looked at me, sighed and shrugged his lean shoulders. "I wonder if you're worth it," he speculated audibly. "Possibly it'd be better to wait until you've married and try again with your children." He rose to his feet. "But I can't take the chance," he said. "Already it's getting too late—in another generation there might be no opportunity to salvage the race. Can't work with material like your society. There has to be *some* balance—and the old civilizations are going downhill. There just doesn't seem to be anything now but nut cults and decadence. There's no middle ground except for a few places—and those are damn near Maximum Survival Density." He capitalized the last three words verbally.

I don't think he was really conscious of my presence at the moment, which was oddly annoying. For an instant he was miles away in a world of his own—a world which I did not understand. And for an equally brief instant I wished I could.

He walked out—leaving me alone with the Halsite.

"Take me outside," I said.

"Boss say no."

"Boss didn't say no—he just told you to watch me. You can watch me just as well outside as in here."

"Boss say keep you in house,"

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the Halsite repeated, grinning cheerfully as he talked, exposing his long, yellow canines.

"Are you afraid of *me?*" I asked with mild incredulity.

"E'Komo afraid of no man," the Halsite said. "Men weak—poor hunters—poor fighters—but Boss say *inside.*" His mouth closed like a trap and he looked sullen.

"You are afraid," I said, putting as much contempt into the words as I dared. "Afraid."

"E'Komo not afraid of any human."

"Of the Boss?" I asked insinuatingly.

"Even Boss—but he my chief. I put my hands in his and gave promise to be his man. Halsite no break word."

"Oh, well," I said, "you'll never convince me with all your talk that you're not afraid of Wolverton." I looked up at his broad, brutal face. He wasn't smart—and he was proud. For the past two weeks I had been feeling him out while my leg was rapidly mending under the doctor's expert care. I despised her, but she knew far more of medicine than did our best. At home, it would be a month away before I would be able to walk, but here I was almost well again. But it would do me no good as long as I was inside the house. Outside, the electronic field that blanked my strength might be weaker—and maybe if I could get far enough away I could escape. If I could once get away from Wolverton's influence he'd never catch me. I could return and tell the Bearers—

Just what *could* I tell them? The thought jerked my plans for escape to a dead halt.

What had I learned about our enemy? What were his weaknesses? How could he be attacked and destroyed? Sure, I knew his strength—but other ones than I had learned of that. And here I was in the very heart of Evil's power and I had learned exactly nothing that would help the Word prevail.

I could have kicked myself for being so stupid—for not leading Wolverton on. Surely Zard must think me a weak reed—a coward—or at best a fool. One cannot fight Evil by ignoring it. The Word came to me, *"Smite Evil hip and thigh. Fight fire with fire—oppose craft to craft—strike down the evil doer with his own spear that the Word may triumph. For in my Kingdom honor waits for those who spread the Word—that the light of the spirit may be passed to other minds and the heathen rescued from the Pit."* What a fool I was to apply the "Canticles of the Young" to Wolverton. It should have been the "Missionary Creed." Against Wolver-

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ton, passive resistance could not win. It would take a sharp mind and resolute spirit to combat him. And it was time I displayed both.

Immersed in my thoughts I did not at first realize where the Halsite was taking me until a brilliant blaze of light struck my eyes. We were outside and the big fellow was pushing me rapidly down a smooth walk between rows of flowering shrubs.

"See—not afraid," he said as he came to a branch in the walk. "I take you outside. Now we go back."

I felt for him and he was all there—and with calculated force I struck! He crumpled, eyes rolling in their sockets, powerless to harm me as I stepped from the chair, limping a little from the weight of the brace on my leg. I looked down at the helpless Halsite for a long second, assimilating what I learned from him, and then I went over the fence and into the darkness of the forest beyond the grounds.

As the trees closed behind me I had a panicky feeling to fly and keep on flying until I was back home with my fellow Adepts in the cloister behind the great cathedral in Hosanna. I longed for the quiet and the comforting touches of my friends. Here I was alone in a savage land with the Father of Evil. The thought unnerved me. I was not used to Evil, and my cloistered days of study and practice as I mastered an Adept's powers were poor experience to pit against such a one as Wolverton. And then I remembered my vow to Zard, and the Missionary Creed, and I knew I must go back and fight him on his own ground. I must appear weak and inept until I could find an opening through which to strike. Yet I must not appear too easy. Wolverton must be allowed to recapture me, but I must make an obvious effort to escape. A pure cleansing wave flowed through me and my spirit was eased and my soul comforted. Zard was with me, and I felt no fear. He was pointing out my course—the only one I could possibly take. Slowly I turned and moved deeper into the forest, using my Adept's powers to confuse the trail.

Wolverton found me as I knew he would. I was aware of him even before he saw me. It surprised me that he had located me so quickly—but that was the only unusual thing about it. His airboat came slanting down toward my hiding place, but I did not move. He stepped out and came toward me, but I did not fly though every muscle in my body screamed for flight. When he was close enough I reached for him,

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but my grip slipped harmlessly away. Still, this did not surprise me for I had not been able to touch him before—and was he not the Father of Evil? But when the glinting metal flashed violet in his hand and the stunning shock locked my muscles in rigid paralysis—I was afraid—but then it was too late—

I was again lying upon the narrow white table while the doctor massaged my stiff body. Slowly a feeling that was agony came back to my numbed body and I stirred weakly. "Fool," the doctor said. "Did you think to escape from *him?*" There was bitter acid in her voice, mixed with an odd note of admiration. "You had courage to try but you should have known you wouldn't succeed."

"I nearly did," I said, "and I would have if he had been slower to pursue. In the dark I could have avoided him."

"He would have found you though it had been as dark as the bottom of the Pit."

"I would have been gone."

She laughed. "You do not know him."

"I know he is the Father of Evil," I said.

"You are wrong—he is not that—he is merely different—older—wiser—but not evil."

It was my turn to laugh, and I did although it hurt my throat and made my chest ache. "It is you who are the fool," I said.

She shrugged. "It may be," she agreed, "but you will learn that Wolverton is master here, and what he wants he keeps. Nor will you escape again."

"Why not?"

"Try," she said. "He has turned the field off."

I tried—and panic flooded me! I did not move—nor could I feel the slightest trace of the doctor although I tried to reach her with all my strength. Then I screamed! And my screams were echoed by her laughter.

The spasm died quickly enough—for I am not a coward. It is the unknown which is frightening—the feeling of helplessness in the face of powers greater than one's own. But then I realized I had chosen this course—that it was not forced upon me, and that Zard was guiding my faltering steps.

"You are lying," I said with forced calmness. "The field is still on."

She looked at me with pitying contempt, rose quietly into the air and floated over my head! "So it's on, is it?" she asked.

My mouth dropped open in a gape of unmannerly surprise. "You're an Adept!" I gasped.

"I was. Now I'm a doctor."

"But why?—why haven't you reported back to Hosanna? You are free. What keeps you here?"

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"I do not wish to leave," the doctor said calmly.

"You're conditioned!"

"You could call it that," she agreed. "I prefer to think I have learned some sense, that I have forgotten the silly superstitions of my childhood when I came here to kill. Ten years ago I was like you, but now—"

"Now," I said bitterly, "you are a minion of Evil."

The doctor's laugh was merry and unforced. "Every year they get worse!" she chuckled. "I see what Wolverton means when he says there's no hope for this world." She floated quietly back to the floor.

I felt crushed and angry at the same time. Who was she to laugh at the Word? Once again I tried to rise. With all my strength I tried, but again I didn't move. There was something warm encircling my neck. I raised a hand to it and touched smooth metal —a close fitting ring about my throat.

"Yes," the doctor said, answering my unspoken question. "That is what restrains you. And it will stay on until he removes it. Nothing can cut that ring." She smiled ruefully. "I wore one once—for nearly five years—"

She kept on talking, something about taking time for the electronics section to develop a wave form that would cancel my powers—which was why I had lived under the field—and why I had a chance to try to escape, but I didn't really hear her. I hadn't figured on this development. It shocked me into utter numbness.

It was two days later before I could rise. The braces were gone from my leg and I was whole again. Whole, but helpless.

Unmolested, I walked through Wolverton's stronghold. I passed the Halsite whom I had struck down. He looked at me and grinned. There was no malice in him.

"You fool me," he said cheerfully. "I not very smart—but next time you try I run you down —bring you back. You no do that thing twice."

"If you can catch me," I answered.

"I catch, all right. You wear ring now. You no get away."

I sighed. He was right.

Later that day I saw Leslie—the Adept who tried to reach Wolverton last year. I waved to him, but he did not notice me. He was reading a book, and the glass wall that separated us prevented me from speaking to him. A silver ring gleamed around his neck —he too was a prisoner, and from the looks of it he, too, was learning forbidden things. I wondered at the unholy spell of Wolverton. What was the devilish power he had over the minds of men that made even an Adept ignore Zard's teachings? There

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was a tense earnestness to Leslie's bent figure, a driving air of concentration he had never shown when learning the writings of Zard. He was absorbed—fascinated—and looking at him I again felt the icy hand of terror grip my mind.

I shrugged it off. So far there had been no invasion of my thoughts. My beliefs were still mine, and although my body was trapped, my spirit was free. And if I could not reach him with my mind, there was always a weapon to rely upon—something that would fit my hand—something blunt to smash—something sharp to drive through skin and flesh into his blackened heart.

But despite my freedom I was watched by seen and unseen eyes. No weapon I could find remained long in my hand. It was the ultimate frustration. And finally I gave it up. I would have to mark the location of weapons and bide my time until Wolverton was close enough to one which I could seize and slay him before his minions could prevent me. Slowly I learned cunning—to dissemble—to hide my intent—to wait.

And while I waited Wolverton talked to me, and I listened, fascinated by the evil of the man. For not only did he mock the Word, he despised It, calling It a superstition-tainted mass of primitive Mumbo Jumbo—whatever that might be. But except for this flouting of the Word, Wolverton was not so evil as I thought. There was a gentleness about him that was strange. My own people had little of this. After all, Promised Land was not an easy world to tame, and our rise to greatness had been the product of unending struggle against an unfriendly if not inimical environment. But in the end, the Word and those who believed in It, were triumphant. Did we not tame and rule three-quarters of this world? Were we not the Chosen? Often I had to go back to basics after a talk with Wolverton. He disarmed me with his friendly voice and with his logic. It was getting harder to resist him—and I understood now how the others had fallen. Wolverton, if he tried, could charm the birds from the trees, make black look white, evil virtuous, and righteousness unrighteous. He was truly a terrible man and I looked forward to his daily visits with mingled dread and anticipation. There was something toward which he was leading me and I dreaded the revelation even while I enjoyed the trip.

We—or rather Wolverton—talked of philosophy—of science—of history—of distant worlds which he had visited with such disarming charm that I learned despite my obstinacy. Soon I be-

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gan to know them—Earth—green Earth, the home-world of the race with her impossible blue skies and seas, gray clouds, white snows, fierce arid deserts, tall mountains and greenly verdant valleys. From her vast forests to her broad plains and great cities, Earth was a thing of loveliness. I could feel Wolverton's passion when he spoke of it—nor was I surprised when he at last confessed that he was born there.

And I learned of Mars—rust red and rugged—harsh and cold—where men lived under domes and husbanded the scanty air and water with miser's care.

And Proxima—first star colony of Earth—a gentle world of soft pastels and grays—a barren world which men reclaimed and made beautiful, drawing from their skill and science to mold the primitive life forms into things of beauty and utility.

And golden Fanar—ripe and lovely with its humanoids and developing civilization that blossomed to full flower when men came and lent their skills and science to their cousins.

And Kungtze—delicate fairyland of violet skies and soft rounded hills like virgin bosoms waiting to be kissed.

And Samar—not the Samar I knew, but a land of seas and islands, tall ships and gracious living.

And Halsey—harsh—forested and forbidding—a world that distrusted and did not welcome man—a world peopled by savage humanoids who united only in the face of danger.

And more—many more.

I learned of them all in the days of their youth—together with the struggles and pain that went into their taming. Wolverton's words were wings that sent my spirit soaring. His tales—filled with courage and adventure, of blood and treachery, of honor and fair dealing, made me proud of my race. We were not perfect, we men—but there was within us the seed of greatness that would perhaps flower into the true bloom. It made me proud to learn the past glories of our race. Almost I could feel that Wolverton was a brother in the great brotherhood of man.

And then he killed the dream—brought it crashing to the ground in a brutal series of horridly frank solidograph projections. These were real people that bled and died and performed unspeakable brutalities upon each other and upon the worlds where they lived.

"On the average," Wolverton said bitterly, "it takes five to six thousand years, but we have been in space longer than that, and some societies last longer than others, but the end is always inevitable."

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He showed me all—a solid month of it.

Earth: A world of legalized cannibalism where men were bred for food—a world of wrecked glory swiftly returning to jungle and desert.

Mars: Redying in slow bitter agony as technology failed under the pressure of excessive population, with legal infanticide, eugenics laws, and tyranny.

Proxima: Bloody and torn—waging suicidal war whose ultimate end would be virtual annihilation of all life.

Fanar: Dead and radioactive.

Kungtze: A huge, monolithic state that owned and controlled everything down to the last living unit, where the population swarmed and jostled in huge collectives that were neither cities nor farms, but something of both—where everything was used even down to the dead bodies of those too old to work, slain by the state to make room for others.

Samar: A matriarchate ruled by the few—filled by the many, where women outnumbered men twenty to one, and the men ruled by the sly and subtle tyranny of sex, and where—despite the disparity of sexes—people swarmed and teemed, and struggled for possession of a place to live and the partial possession of a man.

Halsey: Harsh, forested, and forbidding—a world that distrusted and did not welcome man—a world peopled by savage humanoids who united only in the face of danger. They were united now—armed and ready to resist invasion.

And there were more.

I was sick—sick at the folly of man, who threw away so much for so little. "Whose fault?" I asked. "Why did these things happen?"

"It was no one's fault," Wolverton said, sadly. "It was everyone's. In opening new worlds, people are needed, so they have large families. The tradition becomes established and when at last the world is comfortably filled—instead of stopping—holding the line and consolidating what they have won—people go right on the same old way, producing more and more of their kind until finally the world grows too small. Then they quarrel, fight, and die until they are so reduced that they can start the

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vicious cycle over again—and in the process civilization becomes barbarism and culture becomes chaos. If the world is lucky, it survives to rise again as Earth will do. If it is unlucky it ends like Fanar.

"And that is where you come in. You and the others like you, but you in particular. For you possess in a tremendous degree the ability to *convince*. I could feel it in you despite my shields. It influenced E'Komo despite his loyalty. It made Doctor Sara waver despite her dedication. I have watched and waited for you for generations—for over two thousand years. For here in this enclave I knew you *must* some day arrive. Your origin, frankly spiritual and mystic—your development so ruthlessly selective starting with ritual sacrifice of excess—and less desirable—maidens at puberty—your insistence upon developing the spiritual rather than the mechanistic side of culture—all these were bound to develop psi factors. And they have! It is here, I think, where man's salvation lies. Here is the brake on rising population—a person who can *convince*—who can inculcate into the very soul of men that three children are *enough*—or that two are *enough*—or whatever number is needed to stabilize the population of a planet."

I didn't really hear him. My mind had recoiled from what he had told me. Two thousand years, he had said. Two thousand years! And he was not old! Truly he was the Father of Evil, for only Evil and the soul are immortal! "You said two thousand years, didn't you?"

Wolverton chuckled. "I should have added objective," he said.

I didn't understand.

"It's a trick with time," he explained. "Actually I suppose I'm about forty or forty-five. It's not strange. Anyone with a light-speed ship can do it as long as one stays in normal space time. Take a two-week trip subjective at Lume One and ten objective years go by just like that. It's an old trick. The Timejumpers knew about it before hyperdrive was developed, but it's been forgotten for centuries. Most of the time I'm not here. The Halsites take care of the Holding for me. I heard about you three years ago so I waited until you made your try for me. It was inevitable that you would. Your Bearers are always trying to get me inspired partly by religious and partly by economic reasons—and they pick the best of each year's crop to try. As a result I get about three new recruits a year. The old ones pick them up and indoctrinate them. But we keep up the fiction of Wolverton being here. It's good business." Wolverton look-

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ed at the dumbfounded expression on my face and laughed.

"So you don't understand," he said. "Well, you have plenty of time to learn after we treat about five rim worlds. We'll be practical about it and let you learn about lightspeed and time stasis the normal way—in a spaceship!"

"No," I said.

"But you can't turn me down," he protested. "I thought you understood. People need you—need you badly. Our others can modify a little but they can't convince. It takes a hundred of them to even begin to cover a world—and there aren't very many hopeful worlds left. We have to hold the line or humanity will breed itself into extinction."

"I am still your prisoner," I said, luxuriating in the first real weakness I had found in him. "You might as well know that I still oppose you. I don't believe you. You are Evil and Evil has a smooth tongue—Zard said it long ago, and it is still the truth."

Wolverton groaned.

"Nor will I help you!"

Anger flowed from him. "You stupid fool!" he blazed. "Do you think *I'd* ask *you* to do anything for *me?* His rage struck me like a blow. I'm *telling* you—not asking. You will do something for your race—something you can do, or so help me God, I'll condition everything out of you *except* your superstitious prejudices and maroon you on Samar!"

He meant what he said. His anger was a true anger—and he had spoken the Name we all knew yet did not speak aloud. And he was not struck down. I was confused and upset. I shivered with a fear that was as icy as the River of the Dead. There was something wrong here—something I could not understand. Then I saw the light.

"I will bargain with you," I said. Zard's plan was becoming clear. "I will join you in good faith."

"With what reservations?"

"None—I will swear this by Zard's bones."

He looked at me speculatively. "What is the nature of this bargain?"

"I will join you willingly if you leave this world."

He smiled. "Sorry, it's no go. It's too good a psi trap. And your race has a virtual monopoly on the supply. You presume too much on my claims about your value. You're not *that* valuable."

I sighed. This was not the way. Zard would have opened it if it were. I had weakened—but he had not retreated. I had shown a softness in my armor and had given him hope of conquering—and with that little opening what could he not do?

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He needed but one break in my defenses—and I would be lost. Already I was dangerously weakened. Rapidly I repeated the catechism of Zard as he talked, and presently his voice faded and was gone as the ecstasy of spiritual union with the Word gripped me in firm protecting hands. . . .

"Come with me," Wolverton said a week later. "I have something to show you."

Obediently I rose and followed him. A Halsite followed as we walked out into the sun. We had come a different way than before—a way I had never taken. Before me was a broad concrete plain studded with oddly curved walls. In the center of the area a tall, pinch-waisted, needle-nosed spaceship stood on its landing pads—pointing straight up to the sky. I looked at it with awe. It was bigger even than a trader and it looked oddly menacing yet beautiful.

"Yours?" I asked.

He nodded. "Mine. She's Earth-built—one of the last battle cruisers ever built in an Earth yard. Ships like this aren't made any more—even though she's four thousand objective years old. Come, let's look at her."

As we approached, I could see the ship was enormous. It rose over our heads like some great campanile tower, yet despite its size there was an air of subtle refinement about the mass, an impression almost of delicacy—as though it had been tenderly and carefully constructed by men who loved their work. Each part was beautifully finished and perfectly machined, and the diamond-hard non-corrosive metal gleamed in the golden sunlight. And despite its huge size and absurdly tiny jets, it looked *fast!*

"It's big enough to move an entire city!" I gasped.

"She has a crew of five—and capacity for fifty marines," Wolverton replied.

"All that size—but—"

"Most of it is taken up with weapons systems," he said. "I could utterly destroy a planet of this size with her weapons. She'll travel at Lume One as long as you care to drive her—or she'll go clear up to ultra band in hyperspace. She's the fastest, deadliest thing in this sector—beautiful—isn't she?" He talked as though the ship was a woman—a woman he loved.

"I wanted you to see her," he pointed at the ship, "so that you will know exactly what I mean when I offer you freedom such as you have never known. With this ship we can do anything—go anywhere. Time means nothing—hours in hyperspace—years in normal spacetime. I'm offering you the Universe if you join with

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me to work and save—to keep men from following the old paths to racial destruction." His voice, eyes, and entire body were tense. Conviction flowed from him in smothering waves. I had never really felt the power of the man and I was shaken. Shaken and unsure. For the Word seemed oddly weak in the presence of this titanic ship and the equally titanic man who owned it. I could not explain the feelings that surged inside me—missionary to the human race—freedom from worldly bounds—greed for life and knowledge—weariness and surrender to Wolverton's endless urging—all were there, but there was more than that. I kept looking up at the ship, my head whirling from the dizzying sweep of her—her beauty and power filling my eyes. My heart soared with her soaring lines. I felt quite enthralled—uplifted—caught in a force greater than my will. Now—suddenly I knew why Wolverton spoke of the ship with such passion in his voice. It must have shown in my eyes for a great gladness lighted his. "I will join you," I said in a small voice—and inside me something died as soon as I had spoken. I had the hollow feeling I had lost my soul.

"I will not ask you to swear," he said with odd gentleness. "I have pushed you far enough. Let us go to the laboratory and remove that ring and restore your powers."

A voice inside me spoke sluggishly. *"Fight fire with fire—craft with craft,"* it said. *"Strike down the Evil doer with his own spear,"* but the voice was weak. I followed Wolverton and as I walked the voice became stronger. *"And the Father of Evil took Zard to the top of Mount Karat, and from this high place he offered the world and eternal life if Zard would fall down and worship him. And Zard refused.* I shook my head. I had promised—but what was a promise when it involved the Father of Evil. To slay him, one could promise anything, and yet receive absolution.

The ring was removed from my neck, and with its removal awareness flowed into me. I was whole again! I could see as only an Adept knew how to see. I turned to Wolverton with pleasure in my eyes, and as I looked at him I stiffened with shock!

His barriers were down!!

I could penetrate his mind as though it were thinnest air, and in my brain the voice rang out loud, clear, quick, eager, triumphant!

NOW—NOW!!—KILL!!!

I took his mind in mine, encompassing it. I held his life. One surge of power, one squeeze and he was dead. The Father of Evil

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—helpless in the grasp of righteousness.

I paused, savoring my triumph searching for the evil I knew lay concealed beneath the surface web of flashing thoughts. I probed beneath them, brushing aside his feeble defenses—and stopped—appalled!

For there was no evil, no guile, no treachery—only a deep limpid pool of abiding faith and selfless love for mankind that transcended anything I had ever dreamed. There was anger, too, a clean bright anger at the stupidities and follies of mankind, impassioned yet impersonal, and oddly lacking in bitterness. He knew that I could snuff him out as easily as an acolyte snuffs a candle upon the Altar of Zard. Yet he neither shrank nor feared. And I realized with numbing shock that he had placed himself in my hands, knowing what I was, and what I would do. Frantically I tried to withdraw, but I was immersed in love, drowned in it, absorbed in a warm golden glow that rushed along the power that connected us.

I shuddered. Father of *Evil?* If he was evil, then every responding fiber of my heart and mind was evil too, and I was damned beyond redemption. With a groan I wrenched myself free. I could not kill him. Nor could I longer stand the shattering concepts of his mind. And with stark realization I faced the elemental truth that it was I, not he, who was wrong!

He looked down at me as I stood shrunken and defeated before him, and his eyes were kind. "It was a chance I had to take," he said softly. "And I was right. You were not conditioned beyond redemption." He sighed and placed his hand on my shoulder. It was warm and gentle, and I did not shrink from his touch. "There are many worlds," he murmured, "and it is getting late, and you *are* unique. Another like you might not appear again. The plan would be useless without you, yet without your complete cooperation it would fail. So I opened my mind, dropped the screen which shielded me." He smiled wryly. "Desperate measures of a desperate man," he said with a trace of the old masking cynicism.

But I knew him now and could see behind the mask. A strange wonder filled me. I had tried to apply the Missionary Creed, but it was he who was the missionary and I the convert. Slowly I knelt and placed my hands in his as I would to a Bearer of the Word. "Show me the way, Master, and I will follow," I said.

He raised me to my feet. "No, Saul," he said. "Not that way. In the struggle to come, you will be the leader. Like your namesake."

THE END

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He wanted to look at his wife again.
To do so, he went to the edge of the galaxy.
But it wasn't his fault that she
was jealous of his . . .

Seeing Eye

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

ILLUSTRATOR BERNKLAU

HE DID not need the Skipper's voice, blaring through the speaker on the bulkhead of his cabin, to tell him what was happening. He knew it all so well; the slow descent through the atmosphere, the controlled slide down the long, telescoping column of incandescent gases, the occasional brief bursts from the steering jets to correct pitch and yaw. He could hear it all, could feel it all—the thunder of the rockets, the high whine of the gyroscopes, the sobbing of the pumps. He could hear it all and could feel it all; in his mind's eye he could see it all—the great, gleaming needle that was the ship, the huddle of buildings in the desert, directly beneath her, that was the spaceport, the officers at their stations in control room and engine room, the passengers in their cabins, strapped in their accelleration couches.

Abruptly, the bellowing voice of the rockets was stilled and, less than a second later, there was the slight jar of landing. The ship rocked slightly, her structure complaining as the three vanes that were also her

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landing gear took the weight of her. "You may leave your couches," said the voice from the speaker. "You may leave your couches. The vessel is now berthed at Port Woomera. Passengers will muster in the Main Lounge, to pass Immigration and Customs, in ten minutes."

Home is the spaceman, he thought, *home from the stars. But I'm a passenger now. I'm not a spaceman any longer . . .*

He heard the door of his cabin open. He smelled the faint odor of Vegan tobacco. He knew that only one of the ship's officers—Carter, the Third Mate—smoked cigarettes made from that overly pungent, by Terran tastes, leaf.

He said, "Thanks, Carter, but I can manage the safety belts."

"How did you know it was me, Willis?" asked the Third, frankly curious.

"It's obvious. If somebody comes in smelling of smouldering old socks—who else can it be?"

"I came to tell you," said the Third, "that the Customs and Immigration wallahs are going to push you through first. They'll be along to your cabin very shortly."

I can manage to get to the Lounge under my own steam."

"Of course you can. But you're one of the family. There's no reason why you shouldn't get preferential treatment."

"I *was* one of the family," said Willis.

"You still are. Once a spaceman, always a spaceman. Besides, Mrs. Willis is waiting for you. As soon as the Immigration people have decided that you're a fit and proper person to be allowed to mingle with Earth's millions, she'll be right with you. She's aboard now, as a matter of fact, in the Old Man's room."

Sudden fear was a queasy emptiness in Willis' stomach. He ran his hands over his face. His sensitive fingertips told him that the plastic surgeons in Port Southern, on Austral, had made a good job, told him that his features were as they always had been. But he couldn't be sure. Never, in the old days, had there been any occasion for him to familiarize himself with the *feel* of his face. Any necessary inspection had been accomplished with the aid of a mirror.

"Mr. Willis?" asked a vaguely familiar voice.

"Gavagan," said Willis, after a pause. "Chief of Customs . . ."

"That's right. You're looking well, Willis."

And why did he have to ask my name? wondered Willis. *Am I changed so much?* He shrugged mentally, thinking, *It was probably no more than a conversational gambit.*

"Let's have a look at you,

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Willis." That was Hall, the Port Doctor. "You're sound enough in wind and limb, anyhow. If you can satisfy friend Gavagan that you haven't a trunkful of narcotics you can rush off home as soon as you like."

"I've already chalked his baggage," said Gavagan.

"Dr. Hall," Willis said, "I know you're busy, but I'd like another opinion . . ."

"I'm not a specialist, Willis."

"But you know of specialists. You might be able to recommend one. They told me on Austral that there was no hope at all, that too much had been destroyed for a graft to be successful. They did a graft, of course, but it was only for cosmetic purposes . . . But there's not the medical science on Austral that there is on Earth . . ."

"I'm sorry," said Hall, meaning it. "I'm sorry. I've read the reports on your case—and the only way to give you your sight back would be to graft on a complete new head. There was too much damage. You're lucky to be as fit as you are now."

"So it's quite hopeless?" asked Willis.

"Quite hopeless."

"As long as I know," said the blind man.

Anne came in. The light footsteps along the alleyway had been unmistakably hers, and the rustle of her summery garments, and the subtle suggestion of perfume. Willis tried to picture the grace that was peculiarly hers as she moved, almost succeeded. Almost. He tried to visualize the fine features under the bronze sheen of her hair, the wide mouth. The harder he tried, the more blurred the picture became.

"Johnnie," she said.

"Anne," he said.

It was easier to see her, in his mind's eyes, when she was in his arms. His mouth was on hers. He felt the wetness of her face, on his face, and wondered which of them it was that was crying. He thought bitterly, *They can give me back my tear ducts, but not my sight.*

She pulled away from him at last.

"Let me look at you," she said.

"I wish I could look at you."

"I'm sorry, darling. That was thoughtless of me."

"Please," he told her, "don't try to be thoughtful. Please just say and do all the things you always said and did."

"All right. But you look *good*, darling. I was rather frightened, you know . . ."

"What of? Johnnie Willis, the human hamburger? All the same, I'm glad to hear that the quacks made a good job."

"A *very* good job. If anything, they've rather improved upon the original."

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"Except in one *very* important respect."

"Bitterness won't help, Johnnie. You—we—have to live with this. We have to accept it. And it could have been so very much worse in so many ways."

He put out his hand, gently stroked her face. He could almost see her as she stood there before him. Almost. But the gulf between *almost* and *entirely* is deeper than that between the island universes.

"I'll say my goodbyes," he told her, "and then we'll get the hell off this rustbucket. It's time I was home."

"It's time we were home," she said.

Home, after the swift passage in the chartered stratojet, was a queer combination of the achingly familiar and the horribly unfamiliar. There was the breeze through the open window of the apartment, the summer breeze that carried the scent of parkland and sea, the sounds of the traffic in the harbor. There were all the familiar scents and sounds—but to Willis the window was no more, and no less, than a square of darkness set in all-pervading darkness. There were the bookshelves and the big, all-purpose TV—but surely, in the old days, they had not possessed the malicious ability to project painfully hard and sharp edges in the way of the passerby. There were the pictures on the walls that he could feel any time that he cared to extend his hands—but it was useless, He pined for the oddly four dimensional quality of the two Lindemann abstracts, for the bleak beauty of the Lunar landscape by Buring.

There was the meal that Anne prepared for him. It was good, flavorsome after the monotony of hospital and ship's cooking, but it was not as good as it should have been. "Make food look appetizing," Anne had always said, "and it *is* appetizing." Not being able to see what he was eating, not being able to appreciate the gleam and glitter of silver and china and crystal, the dark glow of the wine in the goblets, robbed the repast of much of its savor.

Then, afterwards, there was love in the dark—and that was the worst of all. Anne was beautiful, and he had always enjoyed her beauty, had always enjoyed visual satisfaction as well as physical release. Breasts and shoulders and thighs, the satin smoothness of a woman's skin, were there still—but he wanted to see them and knew that he would never see them again. Much of the life and color had gone out of their lovemaking, and both of them knew it.

Even so, he told himself, he

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was lucky. He could easily have been dead. He could have been maimed in some way beyond the skill of the plastic surgeons to repair. He was lucky to have been deprived of only one of his senses—but why did it have to be the most important one of all? There was no answer.

He was, he often told himself, lucky.

He was alive, he was healthy, he was not alone. He and Anne, although far from rich, were far from being poor. She worked—as did most spacemen's wives—holding a junior editorship in one of the women's magazines. Then there was the not ungenerous pension from the Interstellar Transport Commission. In addition, Willis cultivated his talent as a story teller. Anne was able to obtain for him one of the expensive speakwriters at trade price and so, every day after she had left for the office, he would sit on the balcony in the sunshine, dictating into the machine. He drew heavily upon his own experience, of course, but his stories were none the worse for that. Once he had succeeded in convincing himself that astronautical technicalities must not be allowed to get in the way of the plot, they started to sell. The planetbound—and they, after all, are the majority of mankind—are always willing to read of adventures among the stars.

For the first few weeks after his homecoming he and Anne did not entertain, neither did they accept invitations. He had to become used, he told her, to the strange world of which he was now a citizen. He had to be sure that he would not disgrace himself by some clumsiness, spilled food or upset liquor. He had to be able to accept his disability to such an extent that he could bear the commiserations of the tactless.

Gradually he came out of his shell. He met all the old friends and made new ones—although most of these latter were old friends of his wife. He prided himself on being able to pour a round of drinks for the guests without spilling a drop, of being able to load tapes into the all-purpose TV without fumbling. He developed a sixth sense that told him when ashtrays were required. He played the part of the host, Anne told him more than once, far better than he had done before his affliction.

Some of the new friends he liked, some he did not. Regarding one of them he was unable to make up his mind. Anne called him one afternoon, interrupting him at his work, in mid-sentence. "Johnnie," she said, "I'll be bringing a friend home for

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drinks and dinner. Bill Travers. He's on the staff of the *Galactic Geographic Magazine.*"

"Yes," said Willis unenthusiastically.

"Bill may be able to help you," Anne told him.

"I can't write articles," said Willis. "Straight fiction is my line."

"I didn't mean it that way."

"Then what way did you mean it?"

"You'll find out. See that the flat's more or less tidy by the time I get home. Make sure that there's some beer in the fridge. See you."

"See you," replied Willis.

He went back to the speakwriter, completed his quota of words for the day, then put the cover on the machine and stacked the pages of manuscript in the top drawer of his desk. He then emptied ashtrays and tidied up in general, after which he had a shower and changed into the lemon yellow shirt and dark gray shorts that he knew Anne liked. He made sure that there was ample beer in the refrigerator. He was sorry that he was not able to relax with a book after the completion of the chores, but he was making slow progress in the learning of the Braille alphabet. Not that it would be of much value to him when he had mastered it, he thought sadly. Cases of total blindness were so rare these days that most of the books printed in Braille were at least a century old.

He heard the approaching drone of Anne's aircar, heard and felt the slight shock as she set the machine down on the flat roof of the apartment house. He heard her coming down the stairs from the roof—the apartment was on the top floor and it was quicker to use the stairway than to wait for the elevator—and heard the footsteps of the stranger who accompanied her. He had the door open for them just as Anne was reaching into her purse for the key. He stood aside for them, then followed them into the sitting room.

"John," said Anne, "this is Bill Travers."

"It's good to meet you, John," said Travers. His handclasp was firm, perhaps a little too firm. His voice was like his handclasp. He exuded an air of rugged masculinity that was just a little phoney.

"Take the weight off your feet," Willis told him. "Drink?"

"Beer if I may. Cold."

"And for me," said Anne. "And then you two can talk while I have my shower."

Willis brought in the glasses and the bottles, poured. While Anne was there the talk was commonplace; after she had

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gone Travers said, "You manage well, John."

Tactless man, thought Willis. He said, "I'm glad you think so."

"How did it happen?" asked the other.

"What's the big idea?" flared the ex-spaceman. "Am I supposed to be providing material for an article in your magazine? If so—I'm not."

Travers chuckled, a sympathetic chuckle. "No, Johnnie. It's just that I think I may be able to help you. I'd like to know more about the accident first."

"I've been to the best specialists on Earth," Willis told him. "They say that it's hopeless. I'm resigned to that now. Let's drop the subject, shall we?"

"Not yet. How did it happen?"

"Surely Anne told you."

"She did—but it's a rare woman who can get astronautical technicalities correct. Even spacewomen—pursers and catering officers and such. The *Galactic Geographic,* as you know, prints a large number of first-hand accounts of this, that and the other—and any contributed by the fair sex have to be very carefully edited."

"I still don't see what concern my trouble is of yours."

"But it is of *yours,* John."

"All right," said Willis abruptly. "I was Chief Officer of *Alpha Scorpii.* We were coming in towards Austral—still a fair way off, but close enough in to demand the presence of a senior officer in Control at all times. Usual drill inside a planetary system—Mannschenn Drive off, approach under reaction drive. Radar showed meteorites on a reciprocal trajectory—as usual it was too late to do anything about it. Not that it worried me much—the meteor shield had been renewed last time at Port Woomera. The trouble was that the meteorites were contraterrene matter . . ."

"And then?"

"It should be obvious. Have you ever had your head pushed into an atomic furnace? No? Well, I have."

"I understand," said Travers carefully, "that a portion of the brain itself was destroyed . . ."

"Yes. Had there been no damage to the brain these fine new eyes out of the bank of the Port Southern Hospital would be useful as well as ornamental. As it is . . ."

"How about the psi center?"

"That, they tell me, is intact. It has to be. A blind man needs a certain amount of ESP to get around. For example, you're just getting ready to rattle your glass to tell me that it's empty."

"Convincing enough." There was a pause. "Did you ever hear of a world called Bronsonia?"

"No."

"I didn't think that you would

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have. It's one of the Lost Colonies. Originally discovered by Captain Bronson of the *Loderunner*, one of the many gauss-jammers that got themselves lost in the bad old days of the Ehrenhaft Drive. Rediscovered a month or so back by Commodore Dalzell of the Survey Service."

"Interesting. What did he find? Savages living in mud huts, or a technological civilization?"

"Neither. Just a nice, stable, agricultural economy. Science, including the medical sciences, almost dead. Such refinements as plastic surgery a lost art. And yet, if one ignores the cosmetic aspects, in quite a few cases no need for plastic surgery."

"What do you mean?"

"Blindness is very common among the Bronsonians; for some reason they are prone to cataract. But they don't run screaming to the nearest hospital to have the defective organs renewed; there aren't any hospitals to run screaming to, anyhow. But they get by . . ."

How?"

"Bronsonia boasts some rather odd indigenous life forms. There is the marsh lion, for example. It's not very like a lion, but those first colonists had to call it something. The male of the species is quite a hefty brute, as its name implies. The female is not. It's about the size of a Terran cat, or even smaller . . ."

"Odd, all right. But you find the same set-up on Earth, as well as on plenty of other planets. There are some varieties of fish, the males of which are mere parasites upon the females . . ." Willis paused. "Even so, to have the female smaller than the male, *much* smaller than the male, is odd . . ."

"They manage. In any case, even though they are mammals of sorts, they lay eggs, which are hatched in a special pouch in the male's body. It's the male who suckles the young, too . . ."

"As you say, odd."

"The oddest part is yet to come. The male is blind, and deaf. For all I know, it has no sense of smell, either. The female is its eyes, its ears. There's a telepathic hook-up between male and female . . ." Willis heard the faint sound as Travers sipped his drink before breaking off at what seemed to be a tangent. "You've heard, of course, of the seeing eye dogs that blind people used to use years ago . . ."

"I have. And of late I've been very sorry that the larger, more intelligent breeds of dog were ever allowed to die out on Earth."

"You needn't be any longer. A female marsh lion—one can hardly call so small a creature a lioness—is far better."

"Perhaps it would be," said

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Willis, "if I could ever afford to have one shipped to Earth. But freight rates are prohibitive, especially to and from planets off the regular routes."

"It wouldn't be any use having one shipped to Earth," Travers told him. "You must go to Bronsonia. You will have to find the marsh cat—I think that's what they call them—that will be *yours*. As I understand it, there has to be empathy between master and . . . and servant? I suppose that's as good a way of putting it as any."

"You're sure of all this?" demanded Willis sharply.

"Of course, I'm sure. We've had access to Commodore Dalzell's reports. Most of what I've told you will be coming out in next month's issue of the magazine, anyhow."

Willis listened to the shower that was still running in the bathroom. The sound reminded him of all that he was not seeing, of all that he would never see again, unless . . .

He said, "If I double my output, if I continue to sell in the same markets that I'm selling in now . . . In a year we should have enough saved . . ."

Travers laughed. He said, "Oh, you'll pay for your passage to Bronsonia, Willis, make no mistake about that. But as far as the actual financial side of it is concerned, *Galactic Geographic* will foot the bill. You'll write a series of articles for us when you get back—we've already thought of the title. *Through Alien Eyes*. How does that sound?"

"And you're serious?"

"Of course, I'm serious. We do you a good turn. You do us one. It's as simple as that."

"You've told Anne all this?"

"Yes."

Willis was sorry. He would have liked to have been able to tell her himself.

The voyage out to Bronsonia was long and not partciularly pleasant. Willis said good-bye to Anne at Port Woomera, then boarded the Commission's *Beta Ursae Majoris*, Earth to Caribbea direct. It was some years since he had served in a *Beta* Class vessel and it was not until the ship was only a week out from her destinationn that he was able to find his way around without assistance. There was a week's wait on Caribbea—during which time Willis tried to construct visual pictures from the sounds and smells of that exotic planet—and then passage to Nova Caledon in *Creole Queen*. *Creole Queen* had been, before the change of ownership, a *Delta* Class tramp. Willis knew very little of the *Delta* Class ships and, in any case, internal lay-out had been altered by her

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new owners. He stayed in his cabin most of the way to Elsinore, in the Shakespearian Sector.

He spent two days on Elsinore, hardly setting foot outside the Spacemen's Hostel at Port Fortinbras. On the second day he was introduced to the Captain of the Survey Ship *Quest* and walked with him, with an assurance that he did not feel, over the blast scarred concrete of the apron to the little vessel. Once in the airlock he had to abandon his false air of assurance. This class of ship was completely strange to him.

He slept for most of the trip to Bronsonia. Looking back on it all, he realized that this was a device to make time pass faster. Deprived of the blessing of sight and with all the Survey Service officers fully occupied with their duties, it was all that he could do.

He was awake, however, when the landing was made. His ears told him what was happening; his ears and every vibration-sensitive nerve of his body. And yet there were gaps in his knowledge. He did not know what sort of world it was toward which *Quest* was falling. He could not visualize the spaceport—if there was a spaceport—or its surroundings. It was a fall into the utterly unknown—and for the first time since his almost fatal accident he felt the beginnings of panic. He sighed loudly with relief when, shortly after the abrupt cessation of the noise and vibration of the rocket drive, there was the familiar jar that told of a safe landing.

An officer came to his cabin, helped him with the rather unfamiliar buckles of the Survey Service pattern safety belts, guided him along the short alleyway to the axial shaft, into the little elevator cage. In the after airlock another officer, introducing himself as one of the medical officers attached to Base, was waiting for him.

He walked with the doctor over a springy surface. Grass, he thought, grass, or something like it. The acrid scent of charred vegetation confirmed his first opinion. And then there was the smell of cooking, the smell of men living together in a confined space, the bustle of an orderly encampment.

"Here we are," said his guide. "This hut is yours for your stay here."

"Thanks."

"Are you sure you can manage?"

"Of course." Willis paced slowly and carefully over the wooden floor. "Bunk . . . Chair . . . Table . . . And behind this door?"

"Your own toilet facilities."

"You're doing me proud. Yes,

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I'll manage all right. Don't worry."

"You'll be managing better in a few weeks."

"A few *weeks?*"

"Weren't you told? First of all you have to find just *the* marsh cat for your requirements. There has to be empathy between master and servant. Then there is a training period, so that the two of you can work together. It's all very well owning a detached pair of eyes as long as those eyes are obedient to your command; if they go running off by themselves it can be awkward."

"So I should imagine. But what's the drill?"

"The marsh cats are captured when young. So, for that matter, are their twin brothers—but *they* finish up in the cooking pot. The marsh cats are kept in captivity, but they are not ill-treated. If anything, they're pampered. Then anybody in need of a pair of eyes, or a pair of ears, goes into the enclosure. He *knows* when he's found the right cat."

"How does he know?"

"If you're blind, you handle the things. I've tried to get the Bronsonians to tell me what happens then, but it seems to be a subject that they aren't keen on talking about. They're a rather puritanical people . . ." ?

"How does that come into it?"

"I don't know. I'm relying on you to tell us."

"I'll do that," promised Willis.

He kept his promise, but felt absurdly embarrassed while he was doing so.

The next morning he rode in one of the Survey Service aircars to the nearest town. He was mystified by the uneven surface over which he and the young doctor walked after the machine had landed. "Cobblestones," explained his guide. "They're very primitive here."

"And that squeaking sound?"

"A four-wheeled cart, drawn by an animal that looks rather like a small Terran elephant."

"I'd say that the standard of sanitation isn't very high here."

"It's *not*," agreed the doctor. "Funny sort of English the Bronsonians speak . . ."

"They think the same about us. After all, they've been out of touch for generations and have evolved their own dialect. Here we are."

"Here" was a doorway through which they passed into a big room. Willis could *feel* that the walls were distant, that the ceiling was high. "Here" was a place alive with soft, rustling movement, a place with straw underfoot through which things scampered and crept. "Here" was a place that smelled of cat, although not unpleasantly so.

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"Be this the blind man?" asked a harsh voice.

"Yes," said the doctor.

"He do not look blind."

"He is. He was badly burned, but the plastic surgeons made a good job of his face."

"And he still be blind . . . Be you sure he be blind?"

"Of course."

There was some sort of scuffle, the noise of which puzzled Willis. He heard the doctor snarl, "Put that knife away, you fool!" He heard the other chuckle, "Aye, he be blind. Be you ready to pay?"

"Of course. Here's the warrant. Present it to our PX and they'll give you goods to the value of five hundred dollars."

Willis heard paper rustle, then he heard the keeper of the cats whistle softly. He heard the scurryings and scamperings as the little animals ran towards them. Suddenly, without warning, something was thrust into his hands, something alive, something disgustingly naked that wriggled.

"Be this the one?" demanded the keeper.

"No," gasped Willis, almost retching.

The thing in his hands was cold, slimy, repulsive. It was snatched from him before he could drop it and another was given to him to handle.

"Be this the one?"

It wasn't, although it was not as bad as the first had been. The texture of its skin was rough and it was unpleasantly hot.

"Be this the one?"

Willis lost count of the number of marsh cats that he handled. And then . . . And then there was the *rightness*. It was then he realized that the empathy of which the doctor had talked was of a sexual nature. The little creature between his hands seemed to glow under his touch, and its skin was the skin of a woman, a beloved woman, cool and yet warm, satin-smooth, enticing . . .

"I think this one is right," he said shakily.

"How do you know?" demanded the doctor eagerly.

"I . . . I'll tell you later . . ."

Then, suddenly and for seconds only, there was vision. It was his own face, but subtly distorted, idealized and yet with an odd suggestion of the animal. It was his own face, filling almost all the field of view, and behind it a suggestion of rough wooden walls.

"I honestly believe that the damn' thing's fallen in love with you," said the doctor, "the way that it's looking at you! It certainly looks that way."

"I can see," murmured Willis. "I can see . . ." Then— "But it's dark again."

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"It be light very soon," promised the keeper.

Willis left Bronsonia before he had attained complete mastery of his seeing eye. To have waited would have meant missing the next sailing of *Quest* and a delay of several months before her return. Even so, he now had sight, erratic though it was at first.

It was all a question of control. The marsh cat had to become accustomed to the telepathic commands of her master, had to accept the fact that Men use their eyes for other purposes than to lead them to food and water, away from danger. The marsh cat had to become used to riding on his shoulder and staying there until released. Hardest of all, perhaps, was training it in the visual mechanics of reading and writing.

Had it been less intelligent it would have been easier. The unthinking dog is far easier to train than the cat, which not only thinks but which asks itself, *Why the hell should I do thus and so and so?* Willis thought that the intelligence of his seeing eye approximated that of the Terran cat. (In that he was wrong.)

Willis left Bronsonia in *Quest* and by the time that the Survey Ship berthed at Port Fortinbras his symbiotic relationship was progressing well. He had become used to the slightly odd color scheme of the Universe as seen through his servant's eyes, to the subtly queer perspective. He had fallen into the routine necessary to the well-being of the little creature—the feeding (it was omniverous) the daily bath, the at least once daily caress. He was rather embarrassed when he realized that this part of it gave pleasure to both the beings concerned.

He became accustomed to the appearance of the animal; he saw it now and again in mirrors. It was more like a plump, hairless cat than anything else, but it was not repulsive, any more than a woman is repulsive when divested of her clothing.

During his week's stay on Elsinore he hired an aircar, was pleased to discover that although the proprietor of the agency looked with curiosity at his strange pet he did not guess that his customer was blind. Of course, Willis told himself, he was not blind. Not any longer.

By day he occupied himself flying about the planet with which, in the past, he had formed only a nodding acquaintance. By night —the Spacemen's Hostel boasted a first-class library—he read, and read. There was so much catching up to do. (Perhaps all this reading was a mistake.)

He was lucky enough to obtain

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a direct passage from Elsinore to Earth—one of the Trans-Galactic Clippers, inbound from a tour of the Rim Worlds, put into Fort Fortinbras and had a few vacant cabins offering. Willis, who had always enjoyed his service in passenger vessels, was rather looking forward to the voyage. It was so long since he had seen any really *chic* women; those on Bronsonia had been little better than savages, the female population of Elsinore seemed to be composed of suburban housewives.

And yet . . .

They'll look better when we're a week out, he told himself. *They always do.*

This time they didn't.

But there's Anne to look forward to, he consoled himself.

Anne met him at Port Woomera.

Anne was . . . Anne.

Or was she?

Was there ever, in the past, that suggestion of . . . of tartiness in her dress, her make-up? Were her legs really too thin, her bust too obtrusive? And the expression of distaste when she withdrew from his ardent embrace at the foot of the ramp . . . had that ever happened?

"Anne!" he said, hurt.

"What is that *thing?*" she demanded.

"Anne—meet Angeline. That's what I call her. She's my new eyes."

"I'm glad," she said, without enthusiasm.

"I haven't kissed you for a long time," he said, his hands on her shoulders.

"I'm afraid it will have to wait. I'm not doing it with that animal *watching.*"

"But it's what she's for, darling. I want to *see* you when I kiss you."

"It's out of the question," she said. Then— "Hadn't you better see about getting your baggage on the stratojet for Sydney?"

"I'd rather hoped that the *Galactic Geographic* would be laying on a chartered job."

"Fancy yourself, don't you? After all, they paid your fares out to Bronsonia and back. Come to that, they're taking a rather dim view of your booking passage with TG; they had everything organized for you to travel in the Commission's ships. You get a reduction there, as an ex-officer of the concern."

"That would have meant at least six weeks' delay," he said stiffly.

"What of it? There are the 'W's coming down the chute now; you'd better do something about your bits and pieces."

Rather resentfully, Willis did. Stiffly he escorted his wife aboard the waiting stratojet. Sulkily, the swift flight east

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across the continent was accomplished. Still more sulkily—Anne refused to let him touch the controls—was the short flight from the airport, across the city, made in Anne's aircar.

It would be better back in the apartment, thought Willis. He enjoyed the first few minutes of being home, the sight of the familiar *lares et penates* that he had thought that he would never see again. They looked a little different, subtly distorted, but he would get used to that in time. He could see them, that was all that really mattered to him.

Later, he followed Anne into the bedroom.

"That thing is not coming in here," she said.

"But, darling, I want to *see* . . ."

"I'm sorry. I'm broadminded, but I've no intention either of undressing or making love in public."

"But . . ."

"You heard me."

The worst of it was that Angeline, shut out of the bedroom, for some reason stared throughout at the bleakly cold Lunar landscape. It rather spoiled things.

The next morning Anne had to go to work.

"I'd rather hoped . . ." said Willis.

"Somebody in this house has to earn a living," she told him.

"Oh, well, I can get back into

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harness myself. I'd better ring that friend of yours, Bill Travers. I want to thank him, and I want to find out what *Galactic Geographic* wants in the way of an article."

"You'll have to wait," she said. "Bill's on Venus just now, covering the Liberation Festival." She went on, "I should have been there myself. My own rag was sending me. When I got your spacegram from Elsinore I had to cancel the arrangements."

"I'm sorry," he said, not altogether sincerely.

"See you," she said.

"See you," he said.

"Keep away from me!" she flared. "I'll not kiss you while you have that *thing* on your shoulder."

Willis thought, hard, *Angeline, go into the other room.*

He gave Anne her morning good-bye kiss—and he saw, once again, the bleakness of the Buring moonscape.

When she was gone he called Angeline back again. He went on to the balcony, took the cover off the speakwriter. He thought, *I'll be able to trade this in now, for a typewriter and some extra beer money. On the other hand, I've gotten into the way of using it* . . . He found paper and carbons. He sat in his chair, looked at the blank sheet in the machine. He thought, *My Eyes Have Four Legs . . . Seeing Life With Angeline* . . .

Both titles were too cute. He needed a smoke while he thought of something better. He felt in the pockets of shirt and shorts, remembered that he had left his cigarettes in the bedroom. He half got up, then decided to be lazy.

Angeline, he commanded, *fetch my cigarettes from the bedroom.*

It was a weird sensation. It was as though he was skimming along almost at floor level—and then, when Angeline jumped on to the bed, there was a brief sensation of flying. He saw the cigarettes on the bedside table, saw the packet grasped in the two little paws.

"Thank you," he said aloud when it was put into his hands. Then, as Angeline clambered back on to his shoulder, he remembered that she did not like tobacco smoke. *All right,* he thought, *I can manage without you for a while. You can explore.*

At first he was not distracted by the scenes that flashed before his vision as Angeline scurried from room to room. The elusive title for the article was still elusive. And then he began to pay attention. Angeline had pulled a magazine from the rack in the lounge, was turning over the pages. He thought, *She's looking at the pictures* . . . But it was

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not an illustrated magazine. He wondered, *Just how intelligent is she? And how much has she learned?* He laughed aloud. She had dropped the magazine, had scurried once again into the bedroom.

Hell! he thought. *I'll have to tell her to keep out of Anne's private drawers!* He watched, not without appreciation, the spectacle of flimsy underwear being held up and examined. He saw the Space Letter that had been hidden by the undergarments being opened by the tiny paws.

He read: "Anne, darling, what a pity that your old man had to come home so soon—especially after I'd pulled so many strings to get him out of the way on Bronsonia! Things were really far better for us when he was a spaceman . . . And we were both of us looking forward to this holiday together on Venus . . . I quite realize, darling, your feelings in the matter, that you cannot desert a blind man. But, after all, he's not blind any longer—and who has he to thank for that?"

Willis stumbled to his feet, groped his way into the bedroom. That letter would not be real until he held it in his hands—and, perversely, he wanted to hold it in his hands. The letter? No. Angeline. He wanted to hold the little devil from an alien world in his hands, wanted to choke the life from her.

He staggered as the walls and floor swung and shifted rapidly before his vision, realized that Angeline had run past him, had scurried into the kitchen. He felt some of her terror, the terror of somebody who had gone too far and knows it.

He realized that she had jumped on to the sink, was fumbling with the little hatch of the garbage disposal chute. It was a way of escape. She did not know that the escape would be permanent and irrevocable.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop!"

She had the metal door open, and she was through. He saw, with her, the blackness of the sides of the chute as she fell. He saw—and it was the last that either of them saw—the searing flames into which she plunged.

THE END

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ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

Smithey drank hard when he drank, worked hard when he worked, thought hard when he thought — and all to drown out the one thing he couldn't stand . . .

The Sound Of Screaming

By THEODORE L. THOMAS

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THE wardroom was crowded when Smithey drifted in. Some of the men played cards, some read, and some gathered near the bar and talked. Smithey, naturally, gyrated toward the bar and ordered a drink. While he waited he tried to thrust his feet into the stirrups at the base of the bar, but Kenyon had to help him. "Thanks, Steve," said Smithey.

Kenyon slapped him on the back and said, "Won't be much longer now. What have you got, another day or two?"

"Yes." Smithey's speech was slurred. "Another thirty-six hours and we'll be there and I'll have to sober up. Disgusting prospect."

The group at the bar was listening, and they smiled. Smithey was never known to draw a sober breath, except when working, and this time it had been six months between jobs. Smithey's face showed it. The eyes were puffy and red, and the face muscles sagged. His body, short, and very broad, looked soft and milky. Smithey seemed out of place among the lean, hair-trained men who made up the Data Gathering Section of the Extra-terrestrial Information Administration.

Across the room, at one of the card tables, Abe Rascoe raked in a double fistful of chips. It was his first trip out. The other members of the Section had made him feel so much at home that he made the mistake of assuming he was one of them. Rascoe looked across at Smithey's weaving figure at the bar. A slight sneer curled his lips and he said, "Why do we put up with a drunk like that in the Section?" Too young to be warned by the silence that followed his question, Rascoe said in a louder voice, "There's no place for a drunk around here. Why don't . . ."

If he had spoken softer, they might simply have interrupted him. But his voice was intended for Smithey's ears, and that was unpardonable. A man reached out, a sudden quick chop on the back of the neck, the sentence was never finished. Rascoe sat, stunned but conscious, as three of the card players casually lifted him from his chair and spun him out to the corridor and held him while he recovered from the blow. One of them said, "We will let the matter drop right here, Abe. But you understand that there will never be another remark about a drunk or anything like that." It was not a question. It was a statement.

Rascoe nodded, looking from one to another questioningly. One of them said, "Smithey is the best surveyor the Section has ever seen. There isn't a man alive who can keep up with him when he's working, and he's got

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to be either drunk or working. Let's drop it right there." They let him go and the four of them drifted back into the wardroom. It was as though nothing had happened. The room buzzed with normal conversation.

Kenyon said to Smithey, "All briefed on your next planet?"

Smithey nodded as he took a long swallow from the container.

"What's it like? Any special problems?"

Smithey shook his head, and the motion made his whole body shake back and forth.

Kenyon stared down at the top of the bar, and asked the next question without looking at Smithey. "Any natives?"

Smithey took a long pull from the container and said, "Yup."

Kenyon traced out a wet design on the bar, and said nothing.

Smithey turned to him. "S'all right, Steve. I got no intention of breaking the Administration's favorite, top dog, number one rule: thou shalt not interfere with the natives, no matter what. I don't hold any grudges. I'll steer clear of them, and if I can't, I'll mind my manners. Okay?"

Kenyon looked at him then, and smiled and said, "Right. If there's anything any of us can do, tell us."

Smithey finished the rest of the container and signalled for another one. He said, "There's nothing anybody can do, not any more."

Landfall on the planet Lipta took place without incident. The entire Section turned out to help Smithey unload and check his gear. The first item was Vehicle, Amphibious, Mapping and Surveying, M 96, abbreviated Vamas, and around it was placed all the auxiliary equipment. There was a small ceremony at the airlock as Smithey, amidst cheers and applause, took his last drink of whiskey and strode with shaking dignity down the ramp to the ground. It took a full day to tick off the items on the checklist, but it was finally done, and Smithey signed for all his equipment. He stood on a low hill and watched the ship take off a mile away. Then he turned to get to work, his step wobbling, his hands trembling, and his head beginning to ache.

There was a week of work to be done before he could start the map-making procedure. Gyroscopes needed calibration, electronic pendulums had to be zeroed, circuits had to be tuned. Smithey used what was left of the first day in packing and storing some of the equipment, placing miniature components in their tiny niches. After dark he tested his marker beam by making contact with the fast-reced-

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ing ship. He could not eat food that first night, and his hands began to shake so violently he had to stop work. He lay down in the sack out in the open, but he could not sleep. He dozed and tossed and turned and fought off hideous nightmares. Frequently he got up and walked about for a few moments in the chill night air. His breath gurgled in his throat, but other than that he made no sound. He fought his battle in dogged silence.

He forced himself to eat some food at dawn, but he threw it up. He finished stowing the gear, and ate one swallow of food. He checked out the reactor motor of Vamas, and ate one swallow of food. All day he worked, checking and resting, and eating his occasional swallow of food. His head ached fearfully and there were times when his body tremors became wild gyrations. He did not sleep the second night, either, and on the third day there were times when he fell down from exhaustion. But larger quantities of food were staying on his stomach, and his muscles, aching and tired as they were, began to behave in a more normal fashion. The third night he lapsed into a deep and dreamless sleep, and when he awoke the headache was gone. He knew he was beginning to throw off the effects of the six-month bender.

Now that his mind and body were beginning to function, Smithey took up the delicate task of calibrating his surveying instruments. The vast plain on which he had been landed served as an excellent checking area. Smithey carefully donned his control belt with its intricate array of dials, knobs, and switches, and preliminarily ran Vamas back and forth over the terraine. He strapped onto his shoulders the transit helmet and laid out a rough equilateral triangle a mile on a side. It failed to close by thirty yards, and Smithey grinned at the error; it could have been worse. Standing at one spot he sent Vamos speeding far and wide to take a position, send up the level rod, jockey the target while he centered the cross-hairs on it, and then move on to a new position. His fingers began to regain their skill at playing over the controls on the belt.

Just before dusk he closed within a yard an irregular pentagram covering thirty-eight square miles. He nodded and said, "Good boy," in the general direction of Vamas, and grinned again. It had not taken long to fall back into the pathetic fallacy; surveyors always thought of Vamas as another person, a full-fledged member of a surveying team.

Smithey brought in Vamas

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and sat down. His fingers played on the belt, and Vamas made camp, using its grasper bars clumsily, correcting some of its mistakes by means of its sensor units. Finally it was done. Smithey ate ravenously, and slept in the open as was his custom. At the first glimmerings of light he was up and eating another huge meal. The task of calibration grew ever more exacting as Smithey continued to tune Vamas's instruments to well above first order accuracy. Vamas laid off a base line to an accuracy of 1 part in 35,000, and reduced the triangle closure to less than one second. In another three days Vamas was ready. Smithey turned on the multitude of tiny recording devices.

Smithey started his work, lean and weak, but clear-eyed and vigorous. The puffiness had already disappeared from around the eyes, and the friendly crinkles began to appear at the corners. He and Vamas moved off into a wide-ranging, zig-zag course calculated to cover an appreciable portion of the planet's surface in a year's time.

In three months he had completed more than one-quarter of the globe. He and Vamas swiftly crossed plains and low-flung mountains and high-lying plateaus. Sometimes they worked a few yards apart, sometimes miles. Smithey always set Vamas to move at a speed slightly greater than his own, and then he tried to keep up. It was a constant race, and Smithey did not mind that his friend always won. Smithey's body turned to granite and piano wire. He worked from just prior to sun-up to shortly after dusk, then he fell into a deep dreamless sleep. He ate incredible quantities of food, living in part off the land, and every night—even in the rain—he slept outdoors. It was a good life, hard enough to keep him from thinking, except once in the fourth month when the routine was interrupted.

Vamas was at the other end of a twelve-mile leg. Smithey stood at the top of a gentle hill, sighting through the transit at the level rod. The recorder in the helmet took up the data, and Smithey turned to go down the far side of the hill. He saw the scenery at the foot of the hill. A creek meandering through a meadow, sloping banks lined with soft-waving trees, a sprinkling of purple flowers in the yellowish grass, and a small scimitar-shaped lake looking black under the ruffling touch of the wind. A hot wave of memories washed over Smithey. He staggered and tried to tear his eyes away from the scene. It was the same as that scene of long ago, so long ago on another

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planet, another planet, an earlier time, yet so very vivid.

Dan and Miriam Smithey went for a stroll, as newlyweds will, and several other members of the Coordination Section of the Extraterrestrial Information Administration went with them. It was a care-free group, out to stretch their legs in the few hours remaining before the ship lifted again. A native encampment was nearby, and it seemed a good opportunity to watch the natives without risk of violating the Administration's strict hands-off policy. The group walked to the top of a gentle hill and looked down. There was a creek meandering through a meadow, the banks lined with soft-waving trees. There was a sprinkling of purple flowers in the yellowish grass, and small scimitar-shaped lake looked black under the touch of the wind. The camp of the natives stood in the shade of the trees.

"Beautiful," said Miriam.

"It certainly is," said Smithey, and he put his arm around his wife's waist. "You'll like this life once you get used to it."

"C'mon," said one of the others. "No necking in the open. You may give the natives ideas, and we can't have that now, can we?"

Dan and Miriam Smithey both laughed and snuggled for a moment and then stood apart, secure in their strength in each other. It was Miriam who saw the tiny splash at the edge of the lake, and who heard the strange mewing cry. She started to walk down, peering at the spot, while the others who had not heard looked the other way toward the camp. Miriam saw the child struggling in the water, uttering its high-pitched whine, swiftly growing weaker, and she ran down the hill to the lake.

The natives heard too, and streamed toward the lake. Smithey and his friends, wondering where the natives were going, saw too late that Miriam was already there. She waded into the water, pulled out the child, and plopped it into the arms of the first native to arrive. Smithey started to run down to her, but the others held him.

The native dropped the child and pressed a pointed wooden stick through its body, pulled out the stick and pushed it through again and again. Miriam screamed, and Smithey struggled to break away and go to her. Several others joined to hold him.

The natives surrounded Miriam, and being careful not to touch her, pushed their sticks in, over and over. There were five men on Smithey, and it was barely enough to hold him. When

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the natives were through with Miriam they turned to the one who had touched the child. He died quietly. Then it was over.

Smithey clawed the ground, biting it, digging it. One of the men pumped a sedative into him, then another, and he passed into a staring coma. It was a week before they could be certain he heard them when they explained: to these natives the touch of a stranger contaminated the body, and the contamination spread to the soul unless the soul was immediately released.

Vamas, homing on the control belt in the absence of specific instructions, came upon Smithey writhing on the ground, biting it, digging it. Vamas stood by like a worried pup, followed closely as Smithey's motions carried him slowly down the slope. Near the bottom Smithey brought himself under control. He sat up, shuddering, took off the helmet and wiped the sweat from his face. He fingered the belt, and Vamas came close. Smithey placed a hand on the dull steel side and said to Vamas, "It was so quick I wasn't prepared for it. The same scene, identical." He pulled himself to his feet and patted the steel. "S'all right, old boy. That won't happen again in this lifetime, at least I hope not. Let's get back to work." And he swatted Vamas familiarly as it turned on its tracks to lay out the next leg.

It was good country. There was ample game, grass eaters mostly, so Smithey ate huge quantities of fresh meat. He stepped up an already strenuous pace in order to keep the image of Miriam deep in his mind where he could not see clearly. When Vamas ranged far from him Smithey covered ground with a distance-eating trot, and there were days when he ran all day. When Vamas and he traveled together, Smithey mounted to the top, and disdaining the seat, rode standing up at breakneck speeds, knees bent, body swaying, a wild and beautiful sight. He was deeply tanned, and his normally brown hair was long and flowing and bleached white by the sun.

Where there were grass eaters, there were carnivores, and Smithey kept alert. Once a shaggy, clawed creature had charged him, and he had had to kill it to save himself. The next time he was not as lucky.

He and Vamas were in a great river valley. The bottom land was black and rich and thick with vegetation, and the once-mighty river had now become a winding stream a hundred yards wide. Smithey noticed a village near a bend in the stream and decided to pass to the south of it. There was no pressing need to

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avoid it, but Smithey felt that avoidance was easier than explaining the data that would appear on Vamas's recorders, or explaining why he had shut down the recorders.

Vamas and Smithey were fifty yards apart, racing through the low underbrush. Smithey swept past a low bush and ran right through the center of a group of cubs. The little animals scattered with yelps of alarm. The female, returning to the site as she heard approaching danger, arrived just as Smithey disturbed the cubs. With a low growl, she sprang at Smithey's throat.

He had no time to draw his pistol. He twisted and rolled away from her, but a claw touched him on the shoulder and drew blood. He continued rolling as he fell. She turned and sprang again. He pulled his pistol and the slug met her in midair and blew off the front portion of her chest. The animal was dead when she landed on Smithey, but the reflex action of the hind legs drove the claws deep into his legs and then downward toward his ankles. Twice the hind legs plunged, and then she lay still.

Smithey threw her to one side and sat up and looked at the blood spurting from his legs. He placed a hand between his thighs and pressed his legs against it to reduce the blood flow to his legs. With the other hand he called Vamas to him and guided the grasper bars. Vamas picked him up and gently placed him inside the cabin. Smithey sat on the floor with his legs stretched out in front of him. First he gulped several pills, then he probed down into the wounds to locate the ends of the arteries. He taped them from the top, and then spread the inside walls of the wounds with the wound adhesive, pressing the edges back together as he worked. One of the longer cuts did not come out right; there was too much slack on one side when he reached the end; he went back and did it over again. It was slippery work, and fast as he was it took him half an hour. Finally he inserted the needle into his arm and started the plasma flowing. Only then did he allow himself to faint.

He was unconscious for ten minutes, and when he awoke his legs were beginning to stiffen. He hoisted himself to the seat atop Vamos and looked around. There would be no surveying for a few days, and Smithey did not like the thought of being inactive and sober. Then he remembered the village to the north. He considered. There might be enough to see at the village to keep his mind occupied, but there was a danger, too. The Administration was serious about

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its hands-off policy, and it would not take much for it to decide that he had meddled. There was no way to conceal it, either. There was a little matter of his oral report, given while sensitive instruments measured his respiration, pulse, blood pressure, and skin condition. Smithey sympathized with the use of the instruments, for they added priceless information as to how a human being reacted emotionally to situations on alien planets. But their scientific value did not at all detract from their efficiency as a lie detector. Vamas's recording banks would be off, and that would have to be explained. A period of convalescence was certainly an adequate explanation, but still . . . The thought of being alone and inactive came to the front of his mind, and it was decided. Vamas headed for the village.

They approached from the south. The uncultivated plain reached to within fifty yards of the back of a row of houses. A grassy strip separated the houses and the plain. A gravel road began at the strip and entered the village. Vamas headed for it.

They were seen as soon as they emerged from the low brush; Smithey noted several heads at the back openings of the houses. As Vamas came near the gravel road, several natives appeared on foot, carrying in a casual manner what seemed to be cocked cross bows. Smithey recognized the casualness; he himself had it in his readiness to roll off the seat into the protection of the cockpit. At the edge of the grassy strip Vamas stopped, and Smithey sat motionless, too wise to make any gesture of friendliness until he knew how these people would interpret it. The natives stopped and stared. After almost a minute, one of them came slowly forward. Smithey wanted to smile encouragement, but did not; it might be insulting. He noted that the cross bows were now held in a slightly more elevated position, the better to cover the man coming toward him. Smithey did not move.

The man stopped and inspected Smithey and Vamas, then laid the cross bow on the ground and held up both hands to show they were empty. This was what Smithey had waited for, and he held up both his empty hands. The man nodded and smiled, and waved Smithey to follow him into the village.

At the center of the village was an open grassy area planted with shrubs, with a brick-lined pool of cold water in the center. Ceramic mugs around the edge of the pool indicated that it was the village drinking place. The area was also the village meeting

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place, for men, women, and children began to gather. Nothing was said; the gathering was silent. When the people were all there, an old man who had been one of the first to arrive stepped up to Vamas and began to speak in a guttural dialect. Smithey understood the basis of the language; his preparations for his work on the planet had included that much. He could barely get the drift of what the old man was saying, but it was certainly some kind of welcoming speech. These people had known of his presence on the planet, they had been informed that he did no harm and kept to himself, and they welcomed the friendly visitor.

Smithey replied as best he could, but they could not fully understand him until he painfully hoisted himself into a position where they could see his lacerated legs. Then they understood, and there was a sympathetic rubbing of legs and a sorrowful shaking of heads and the repetition of a word that sounded like *gunder*. One man stepped forward and showed Smithey a long scar on one of his own arms. They recognized the wounds, and knew the animal that had caused them. The old man talked again, and eventually made it clear to Smithey that they knew he had come to them to stay while he healed, and he was welcome. The old man dipped a cup of water and handed it to Smithey along with a piece of fruit. It was a ceremonial offering, and Smithey ate and drank all of it, hoping it was proper for him not to leave any. When he finished the crowd dispersed. The old man waved Smithey to follow him and led him to a house and pointed to the door. Carefully, Smithey explained that he would stay where he was, pointing to the bunk in Vamas. No indignation appeared on the old man's face. Instead he smiled and led Smithey back to the square and pointed to a site where Vamas could park. Then he went off. The man with the long scar returned. He climbed up on Vamas and sat down in front of Smithey and gently arranged Smithey's legs so there was no muscular tension in them. Then he began massaging the legs, carefully probing into the muscles with the fingertips, working softly from the inner and outer thigh at the same time. Smithey felt embarrassed at having a stranger massage his legs, but the embarrassment passed when the legs began to feel better. The man smiled as he felt Smithey relax, and Smithey smiled back. It was an odd kind of massage that seemed to draw the soreness from the muscles without disturbing the incisions.

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The man finished and tapped Smithey on the shoulder and then left without saying a word.

The next two days passed swiftly for Smithey, despite the pain. There was no infection, his pills saw to that, but he refused to take any soporifics. He sat on Vamas and painfully did the things that had to be done. His ordeal was made easier by the villagers. About every three hours one of them came and massaged his legs. They all seemed to have the same pain-relieving touch, and they all smiled warmly at Smithey as they worked. Others took turns coming to talk to him, putting up with the frustrations of the language barrier, filling in the gaps with gestures. They were a gentle, friendly people. Smithey talked and gestured and watched from his position in the center of the village square.

The village represented a strange mixture of a hunting community and an agricultural community. To the north of the village were fields where tubers and grains were cultivated. A few corrals contained some food animals. But the bulk of the meat was brought in by hunters. The men went out into the forests and plains and hunted wild animals. Yet the community could support artisans, mostly ceramicists. These men made the housewares and the few metal implements in evidence. They also made the brick from which the houses were built, square, kiln-baked brick with a hollow core. Clothes were made from thin strips of leather.

Government was loose. Someone acted as chief until he wearied of it. Since there were no special privileges and no prestige associated with the position, it was not sought after. Families shared food and goods with each other, and custom controlled such events as birth, death, marriage, and childbirth. There was nothing in the culture of the village that was particularly alien to Smithey's background. They were a gentle, fragile people, slim of shoulder compared to Smithey's great breadth.

By the third day the soreness in Smithey's legs had eased, and he was doing well; the many massages had produced a remarkably speedy recovery. In the afternoon he stood up for a few moments. He twisted his torso and stretched his arms, and it felt good to pull the muscles. He did not sleep well that night. He was no longer exhausted from the effects of the wounds, and he had not had enough exercise. Images of Miriam began nagging at the corners of his mind, thrusting their way up into his consciousness. He fought against them but they persisted.

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He got up and forced himself to walk a few steps around the outside of Vamas in the darkness. His legs hurt, but he welcomed the pain. He went back to bed and dozed, knowing he would soon have to be on his way. He tossed in his sleep and gritted his teeth against the sound of a woman's scream. The sound left him limp, and he awoke again and sat up, still hearing the echoes of the scream. It was so real he pulled himself to the top of Vamas, and listened. At the far end of the village there was the sound of voices, some talking, some calling. Lamps appeared, and a small crowd gathered, and then a woman's scream sounded again, piercing, probing into the blocked portion of Smithey's mind. He prepared to move Vamas down to the disturbance to see what was happening, but the crowd began to disperse, the lamps went out, and there were no further sounds. He went back to his bunk and dozed until dawn.

He ate breakfast before the sun had cleared the horizon, and then he went out and tried walking around Vamas again. His legs seemed much better. He could feel that the more he worked his legs, the more they would loosen. Smithey made up his mind to leave the village that day. He would continue the survey slowly, gathering speed over the next weeks or two.

An air of suspense filled the village. People walked quickly from one house to another, and small groups gathered in the streets. As the sun slowly climbed higher, the tension grew. Smithey completed his check-out of Vamas, and hobbled to a group of villagers who were talking excitedly. They took little notice of Smithey, and he had to place a hand on the shoulder of one of them to command his complete attention. Smithey haltingly asked what was going on. The entire group then began to explain to him, all talking at once, and Smithey could understand none of it. He laughingly waved them quiet and signaled to one of them to explain. In time, and with many interruptions from the others, the story emerged.

Last night a fourteen-year-old boy had walked in his sleep. He had gone to the roof, still in his sleep, and his mother had followed, expecting him to awake at any moment. The boy had walked perilously close to the edge of the roof, and his mother—foolish creature—had pulled him to safety. Imagine? A person interfering in the life of an unmarried adult? Stepping in to change the course of events? She had been seen, and some of the punishment had been administered

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right then and there. But the rest of it was to come this morning, right now in fact.

Smithey tried to tell them he was leaving. They understood, but they were preoccupied. They all left to watch the punishment, for this was a rare event. Smithey shook his head, but he knew it was none of his affair. He knew enough of their customs to know he would do no harm by leaving now without saying anything more. He turned and walked south, out of the village to pick up his survey. He left the gravel road and crossed the grassy strip that separated the village from the plain. And it was at the edge of the plain that he heard the woman again, just as he had last night. It struck deep into his mind and opened up all the old memories again.

Smithey stopped walking, and his knees slowly sagged. He fought the overwhelming tide of thought on his knees in the grass, hearing the sounds, knowing them for what they were, but unable to separate them from the other screams stored at the bottom of his mind. And as he fought with himself his hands strayed to the belt and unknowingly began to play there. Behind him Vamas whirled and moved back into the gravel road and up toward the other end. Even faster it moved, spraying gravel rearward from the fury of its acceleration. It was still accelerating when it hit the tight group of people at the other end of the village. It changed course and plowed through a wall of a house and back out into the street and through lines of fleeing people. It settled into a tight criss-cross path that swept every yard of the village at enormous speed, its tracks ripping into brick and dirt, its grasper bars tearing at everything upright in the range of its ultra-violet and infrared sensors. Back and forth over the wreckage of the houses it spun, leveling the village so that no stone or brick stood higher than the surrounding plain, and nothing moved in the streets or near them.

When the quiet came, Smithey won his battle with himself. His hands dropped from the belt as unconsciously as they had sought it. He shook his head, and slowly and painfully climbed to his feet. Vamas homed to him, and he climbed aboard and rode to the south, not looking back. "Nice people," he said to Vamas. "I hope they don't hurt that woman too much. Wish I could have thanked them properly for those massages, but I can't stand the sound of a woman screaming.

He turned on Vamas's recording banks and they got to work.

THE END

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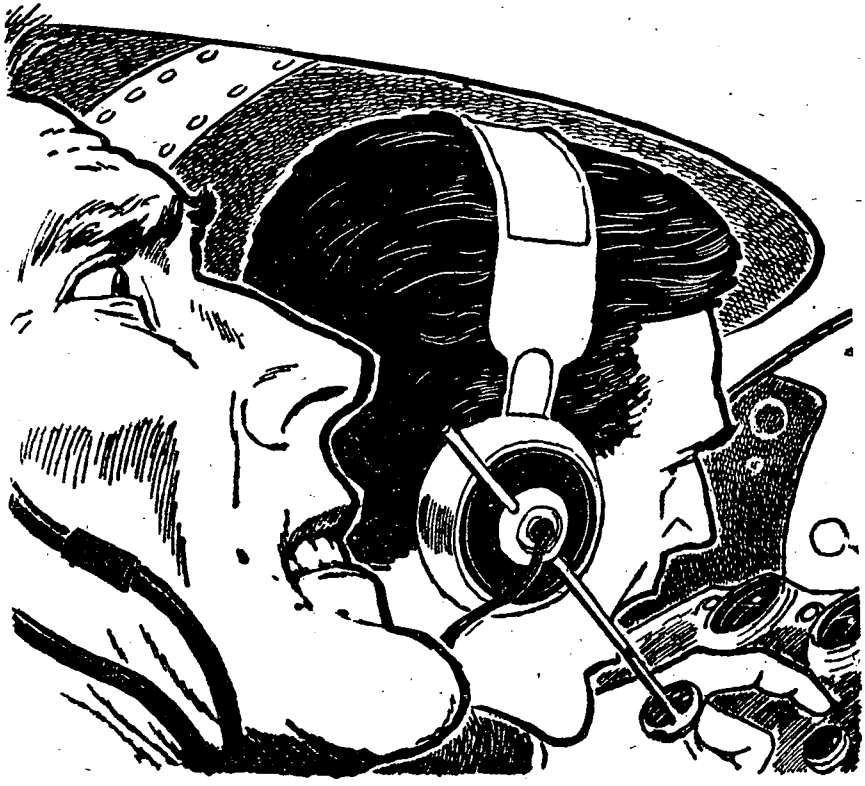
The HIGHEST Form

By JOHN JAKES

U.S. Navy scientific tests show that dolphins have a larger brain than man, a language, and a social organization. The next question, logically, is: What do the dolphin experiments reveal about man?



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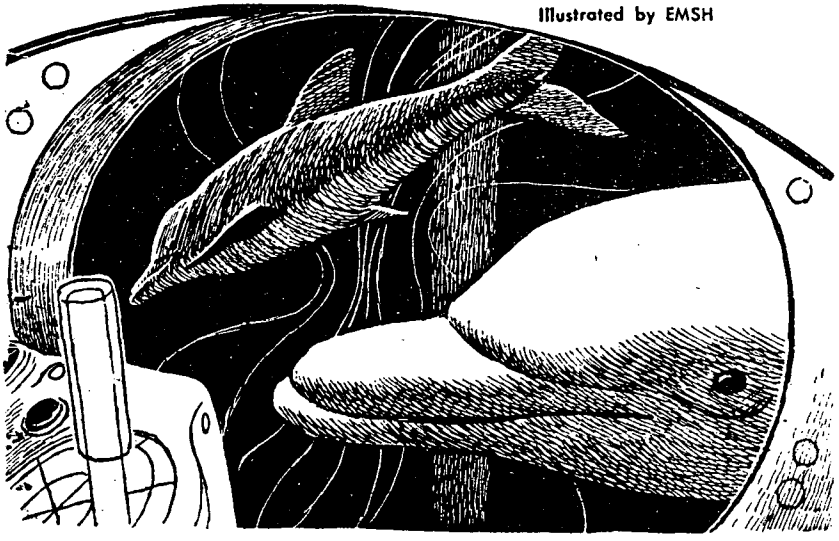
# of LIFE

IN the lives of most men there are a very few, certain days on which they not only sense their purpose but know that a fraction of it may be accomplished. So it was with Dr. Robert Conn, when the alarm went off in the cottage in the hot Florida dawn. His mind said, *14 April,* and even his own breathing had a sound of music.

All the light had a crystal reality as he dressed in the uniform thoughtfully provided by Lt. Commander Spiegelglass, ate all the breakfast his nerves could stand—three cups of chicory coffee. His wife and his two little boys were like sunlit ghosts. He could not reach or touch them in his excitement. Spinning the Volkswagen out of the drive for the ten mile run to the cobalt water of the Florida coast, he hoped that they understood.

He exceeded the speed limit all the way, roared through the checkstations with impossibly witty quips for each bored seaman at each check box, and braked with a stamp of his foot alongside the nuclear submarine *U. S. S. Sharkbait.* On the tower Sig Spiegelglass and Don Maddow were watching him. Neither man smiled or waved.

Illustrated by EMSH



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Conn wondered about the lack of smiles only for a moment. He found himself caught in the middle of a half dozen reporters.

"Is it true you're going to communicate with a fish this morning, Dr. Conn?"

"Not fish." Conn smiled and polished his glasses. "*Tursiops truncatus.*"

"The press release says that means porpoise," said a grating female voice.

"I'm afraid the press release writer didn't look up the difference between the bottle-nose dolphin and the common porpoise," Conn replied, hoping he didn't sound too stuffy.

"You really think communication will be possible?"

Conn gestured to russet-haired Dr. Maddow watching impassively from the tower. "With Don's impulse translator—you should have the details in those releases—anyway, it was worked out by a team of engineers and philologists at Randco—"

Over a moving ballpoint a whisky voice said, "Maddow's the philologist on the team?"

"The best in the business," said Conn, raising his head. Maddow still wasn't smiling. "We think the combination of a language specialist and a neurophysiologist is ideal for trying to break through and translate whatever Bottle-nose may be saying."

EVEN as he spoke, Conn realized they couldn't possibly be as excited about it as he, because they reached excitement by different means. Special press runs, maybe. Names announced at a Pulitzer dinner. But for Conn it was impossible to ignore the sense of immeasurable awe, of reverence, which filled him whenever he thought of the small wonders the impulse translator might work before the sun went down over the green coast tonight. Patiently and lovingly Conn repeated most of the information in the press release: the cell count in dolphin brains; the forty percent greater brain size; the precocity shown by the biggest of the creatures in the learning experience; the unmistakeable twenty sounds which made up their squawking, whistling alphabet.

Since the cell counts are the same as the human brain per cubic centimeter," Conn said, "and the brains are bigger, and they have a language, we think we can communicate—make a first bridge between mammalian forms, as it were. It's taken us six years to perfect the translator."

"Would you consider this problem as difficult or important as the communication established last month by the Southwerk Mirror with—" The reporter's voice hesitated and a couple of

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heads looked skyward. "—whatever is out there?"

Conn winced, enviously. Southwerk had scored a jump on the oceanographic team. Rather stiffly he said, "That was a marvelous achievement—the definite establishment of communication with a being or beings not of our Earth who have orderly, organized speech. Of course," he couldn't help adding, "Southwerk hasn't yet translated."

"Is that a case of interservice rivalry, Doctor?" someone asked in a barbed way.

Conn laughed. "I think I'd better get aboard." Amid Thank Yous, up he went, up the ladder, triumphant, up the steel sides toward the hot morning sky where the heads of Spiegelglass and Don Maddow floated like balloons. For an instant Conn felt totally like a god. Then he climbed into place beside them. He noticed that Maddow was staring emptily out over the gantry skeletons far across the yard.

READY to take her out, Sig?" Conn said.

"Why bother?" Maddow snarled. "We've been had."

"What's this?" Conn laughed nervously. "You guys trying to bug me?"

Sig Spiegelglass studied the cigar he was unwrapping. "I wish we were, Bob. Last night, around seven, Coast Detection picked up a sub out there."

"Then beam Washington and have it clear out," Conn said, a little irritated.

"Beam Red Square, you mean." said Maddow sourly.

Now the matchless, empty blue heavens had invisible clouds in them. Conn felt a chill wind through his blouse. "One of the regular line jobs?"

"Uh-uh." Maddow shook his head. "When the profile tape was developed it showed an unusual configuration. In fact they have only one like it."

"Oh, hell."

Conn seized the steel rail and stared down at the reporters drifting off. A tug hooted off the Florida coast in the lost cobalt distances, a dirty sound. Conn said:

"The *Nikolai Fernoyon?*"

Neither Maddow nor Sig answered when Conn pronounced the name of the almost legendary oceanographic vessel which carried three times the crew of the *Sharkbait*. For a long moment Conn hoped either of the men would answer in the negative. Neither did. Conn indulged himself in sixty seconds of the foulest language he knew.

Then he said, "I wish I had a knife. I wish I had a knife to castrate the dumb block-head in Washington who classifies Wash-

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ington's birthday and lets our preliminary papers in every damn Sunday supplement in the country."

"We're wasting time," Maddow said dispiritedly. "The *Fernoyon* has an instantaneous press transmitter. If they've made contact, they'll wait until we go out in the torpedo, and then Tass'll break the story they've already got set in type."

"Maybe they don't have a translator," Spiegelglass said hopefully.

"So maybe they'll tap in on us," Maddow snapped back. "And before we can transmit, they'll have the message in their sheets and how are we going to prove them liars?"

"If they don't have the dingus," Sig said, "you could foul them up by not putting out in the torpedo."

Even though he had a sick, wasted feeling in his stomach, Robert Conn shook his head. "No, we have to go out. I don't care if they do tap us. I don't care whether some crummy witch doctor in Africa thinks the *Fernoyon* did it and we didn't just so long as I'm there, just so long as I know." Conn's pale face burned like a coin hit by the sun. Spiegelglass picked up the tube and talked around his cigar:

"You gentlemen down there stand by. We are about to participate in another in the series of ever-popular U. S. propaganda defeats."

OF ALL the lousy, crapping luck," Maddow said harshly. He spun on Conn. "And you stand there saying it doesn't matter."

"It doesn't," Conn said, trying to convince himself. "Once you get over acting like a six year old and realize that we aren't supermen in this country—that what we're doing, we're doing for everybody—" He seized Maddow's shoulders. Deep below the two men a faint fury from the reactors tingled up through the soles of shoes. "We've made contact with something in space and now we're making contact with another mammalian life form, real contact, intelligible—"

"We think," Maddow sneered. "Bottle-nose probably speaks Ukrainian."

Conn was getting a little hysterical: "It's the human race doing it, man himself, Don. Don't you see, it's—"

"Unless you gentlemen would like to float to Jacksonville," Spiegelglass said around his cigar, "I suggest we go below."

Maddow ducked down, preparatory to obeying, but could not resist a last thrust at Conn as his russet head vanished down into the artificial gloom: "Sorry, Bob, but I can't see it. I'm funny that way."

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"If you don't want any part of an experiment like this," Conn shouted furiously, starting down the ladder after him, "You should have put on your American Legion cap and gone home a long time a—"

"Please get off my tower," said Sig Spiegelglass. "We're already forty-two seconds overdue."

Thus, with Conn and Maddow sulking on either side of the twenty-foot cylinder they called their torpedo, the *U. S. S. Sharkbait* moved slowly out between the gantries into the mercurial blue swell of the sea.

The intricate ritual of command, the soft blink of colored lights went on around them. Conn gazed furiously at the russet-haired Maddow, wondering why Maddow couldn't see the triumph of it, regardless of who won the propaganda advantage. Besides, the presence of the gigantic Russian oceanographic sub might be sheerest bluff.

Then, with a start, Conn recalled the intense personal feeling he had experienced upon waking that morning. What had happened to it? This was *his* mystery and miracle, his and Don's. Gradually the hastily-assumed attitude of the tower grew less strong.

A SIMILAR process was apparently taking place in Maddow's mind. After all, they were grown men. Before too many minutes had elapsed, they were speaking, though not laughing. For Conn, the personal mystery of it would not return, knowing as he did that he might not be alone in the victory now. All that was left for him, and for Madow too, it seemed, was a kind of defeated gray calm, and a desperate clinging to the expressions of "doing it for all men" which Conn had so suddenly espoused in the heat of argument. But they were friends again.

On the color television a green hairline showed the Florida coast far behind.

"Take her down, please, Mr. Olufson," said Spiegelglass.

Then came the sensation of incredible power, the nonexistent yet palpably real surge and tingle that got inside Conn's bones when he watched the watery line sweep up and obliterate the sky on the screen. Cobalt shaded to emerald. And from out of a lucite panel on four stanchions, strange echoes began to bounce and sing. There was a low note and several higher ones. Every face in the mixed lighting—red, green and a bit of blue—showed that the low note was wrong.

"That's *Fernoyon*," said the conner, adjusting his earphones.

"Right in the middle of the school?" Maddow asked.

"Center, and not moving."

Maddow's face was the color

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of the sea outside. "So we do their work for them, Robert?"

"It is their work, in a way," Conn said, but the words felt hollow on his tongue.

"Philosophers I got to have," Spiegelglass said, his head floating blue in the half-lit maze of pipes and lights and bouncing eerie echoes. "Stop being such big social brains and climb into the torpedo. I'm carrying orders, you know. We're shooting you in twelve minutes. If something sticks out, it's not my fault."

The *Sharkbait* pulsed quietly, moving outward and downward through the plankton and the great pastel anemones, downward through whirling darts of phosphorescence brighter than stars in a liquefied cosmos of achingly beautiful green. As if to emphasize the importance of the coming contact, Spiegelglass activated all the annunciators throughout the sub. While Conn and Maddow peeled their uniforms and squeezed into the flexible black skin suits, there was not a sound on the entire submarine except for the low note counterpointing the steadily noisier higher ones that signalled the dolphin school.

Through the sealed plastic soles of the suit Conn felt the reactors under the plates like his own heartbeat intensified. Maddow, all business, slid back the double-hinged cover of the torpedo. Just under the curving forward plate in the narrow miniature sub, a row of green eyes like six eyes in a line gleamed on the ultra-simplified dials of the translator control. Maddow raise his hand in an Alphonse-and-Gaston gesture.

Conn's face, haloed in black plastic, shone with sweat. "I don't want to go."

"The Kremlin got you buffaloed, sport?"

"It's such a rotten shame, after so long—"

Maddow laughed. "I sang that chorus in the last set."

"I know, but—" Conn wiped his face, feeling faint. "All of a sudden—"

"'It's man,' you said."

"No." Conn shook his head. "It's me, first."

"I suppose it's probably some of both," Maddow said, his voice surprisingly soft. "And that's probably why we make so many rotten mistakes. If—"

THE annunciator squawked with the voice of Spiegelglass: "Will you both please cut out the penny philosophy and haul yourselves inside that thing? Four minutes." So there was no more time for Conn to wonder why he felt both triumphant and defeated, when nothing at all had happened.

He crawled up over the torpedo and wriggled out prone on the

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port side, facing the plate and the six green eyes in a line. Maddow came in after. On his back he took care of the gasketing while Conn snapped controls that closed the cover. With much cursing Maddow wriggled over on his belly. Beneath them an oiled track moved. Ahead of the plate a black hole opened like an iris to swallow them. Conn had never felt more afraid in his life.

"The talker," Maddow hissed in the humid, sweating dark.

Their only companion for the next two minutes was the voice of Sig Spiegelglass, counting steadily and tonelessly. The last whisper of his one-count was drowned in a whoosh and roar. The black burst open and became green, white-streaked and furious, and they were launched in the deeps.

As the torpedo began to lose speed Maddow asked, "See anything?"

"Up ahead, I think," Conn replied. "But don't use the light. I wouldn't want to frighten them if we can help it."

"The vanes, at least."

Maddow raised on his elbows, his head jammed against the ceiling, and manipulated two of three rods with lucite handlegrips. The nose of the torpedo dropped a degree. Over the hiss of his own breathing Conn heard the light bubbling of the tiny reactor and the whispers of the controlled air system. He stared out into the miraculous green gloom of the undersea until he thought his eyeballs would burst. An instant before the image came permanently into his brain, his nerves felt it:

"There they are. Cut everything but the stabilization."

The bubbling stopped. Maddow sighed. "They're beautiful."

And they were. Conn counted two dozen before giving up, long graceful shadows, some almost inky, others grayer, but all ghostly on their underbellies and the under-sides of their jaws. Among them were giants Conn estimated to be well over the twelve foot average for the species. Some of them moved lazily, in a random pattern. Others, racing up for the surface, created a sort of basketweave effect, lacing in and out among the big females swimming belly up for courtship. One flashed near. Conn thought he saw an eye gleam. At least he knew that the eye could be watching him, because the eye could see better than fifty feet, and if inside that bottle-shaped head lodged a brain that could interpret—

ALL of a sudden Conn remembered the *Nikolai Fernoyon.* But there was no sign of it. Of course there wouldn't be.

Maddow raised a tentative hand to the six green eyes.

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"Are you ready?" he asked.

All Conn could think of saying was an inane, "Now or never."

Maddow threw on a switch. The circuits under the deck warmed for a millisecond. Then came the first faint sound, a mixture between a squeak and a drawn-out whistle.

It made Conn's spine crawl, transmitted as it was so perfectly through the exposed sound dishes on the torpedo's surface. In another second, as half a dozen of the huge creatures shot past their little craft, Conn heard the gabble intensify. He and Maddow were caught in the center of an underwater cocktail party, a kaffee klatch from unearthly voice boxes. Conn found himself reaching out for the switch which would activate the translator. His hand shook. He looked over at Maddow.

"You do it."

"Let's not be cornball," Maddow said, but his eyes were huge with wonder.

"All right. Count five."

"Five," said Maddow.

"We won't get anything," said Conn.

"Three," said Maddow.

"But if we do. Don—God—all my life—"

"One," said Maddow.

Before Conn's finger could hit the control a new sound blasted the speaker.

Conn's belly twisted within him. "What's that? The Russian sub?"

"I—don't know." Maddow sounded like a small boy, frightened.

They both listened for a full minute. An eerie, spiralling wail came down, it seemed, from above. Maddow switched off all the sound dishes except the dorsal and verified it.

"But the *Fernoyon* should be below us," he insisted, "and we're getting this from up above."

There was a dull thump. One of the dolphins had lashed itself against the torpedo. The whole school was moving, diving and shooting up in a senseless frenzy. Maddow cursed.

"They want to louse it up for us. They've done something in the sub—"

"That doesn't come from any sub," said Conn, pointing.

THROUGH the plate they both saw it, an unbelievably bright and round column of bluish radiance which lanced down from overhead, straight through the school of dolphins, illuminating their slick darting bodies like a searchlight. The water began to churn and grow violent as the agitation of the school increased.

"The translator," Maddow said furiously. "Get it on, fast."

Helpless with confusion, Conn manipulated the controls automatically. A guttural, crackling

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sound came harshly into the tight confines of the torpedo. "That isn't Bottle-nose."

"Then what is it?"

Conn indicated the blue beam which remained steady as it vanished downward to the impenetrable bottoms of the ocean floor.

"That."

Now the dolphin school had quieted. The huge mammals seemed to be circling the light in orderly, layered circles, four and then four above and then four more, on up toward the surface out of sight, each circle moving opposite of the one directly below and above. Conn imagined he was watching a ballet performed by human beings in elaborate costumes and wondered whether he was experiencing some unique underwater phenomenon never before mentioned in the texts on reaction and hallucination.

Abruptly impotent fury twisted Maddow's face. His hands flew on the lucite-handled levers. The torpedo nosedived, the bubbling grew louder.

Conn tore at his friend's arm. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to ram hell out of those creeps on the *Fernoyon.*"

"Why?"

"Because this is their foul-up, damn it, it's—"

The torpedo struck the shaft of bluish light and a huge indentation was hammered into the ceiling. Lazily the vehicle spun end over end, impossibly off course, impossibly out of control. Maddow and Conn tumbled like squirrels in a revolving cage. At last their frantic hands on the vane levers righted the craft. Now Conn felt overwhelming terror and confusion.

"We hit that light," he said. "No light on earth can—"

Both men looked at one another.

At last Conn swallowed, painfully. "Where's Bottle-nose?"

"Not talking," Maddow said, as though he had wandered drunk and dirty into a church during an Easter service, and had wakened to find himself retching before the altar. "Not talking. *Listening.*"

STILL the guttural crackling continued Maddow suggested trying other frequencies. Like a madman Conn operated the controls. He caught a syllable, shouted aloud, lost the syllable in a too-hasty twist of the primary dial, regained it a moment later. The voice the two men heard was oddly slowed, like a one-hundred r.p.m. disc being played at sixteen. The accents could not be identified because they did not exist: it was a metal voice, an impulse funnelled through their translator and unscrambled into the sound-code their own minds could understand:

"*—picked up Southwerk. Wish*

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no contact." A sharp, jittery whine of interference, followed by the words: "*—egocentric—pitiably brutal—*"

"There goes *Fernoyon,*" Maddow shouted suddenly.

Rising up on foaming columns a great black bulk lurched surfaceward on the far side of the blue light. Now the dolphins had circled closer to the beam. More interference—the translation of the guttural voice was lost. As if linked together telepathically, Conn and Maddow began to work furiously over their instruments. The underwater world became a kaleidoscope of darting, spiralling dolphin shapes whirling upward near the beam. The torpedo broke surface.

Maddow hammered at the gasketing devices like a man possessed. He and Conn scrambled up and inflated their airpacks as the torpedo began to fill, forgotten. The sun blinded Conn, but he distinctly heard the squawk-and-buzz of the school before the amplifier submerged, and the squawk-and-buzz of the school had been translated to words, and the words were:

"*—we are the highest—you are the highest—we seek you—*"

THE *U. S. S. Sharkbait* was surfacing thunderously. The *Nikolai Fernoyon* was already up, men in underwear pouring out of its tower, one, with a blond Georgian beard, waving his starred cap at the two men bobbing on the torpedo. Conn and Maddow clung, Conn with salt water and gall in his mouth. His face was so wet with the swell he could not taste his own tears.

He choked through mouthfuls of water: "They—neither—they don't—" He swallowed more water, gagging. "—want us."

And indeed the dolphins did not, lancing up from the surface. They spiralled like beautiful glistening machines, around and around the blue beam of light, high toward the clouds, dots in the blueness of the sky now, riding the blue ladder of light, hundreds of them, a thousand of them from the floor of the ocean, riding up and rising toward the sun-hot circular blur of silver light that was the ship from beyond waiting to greet them.

THE END

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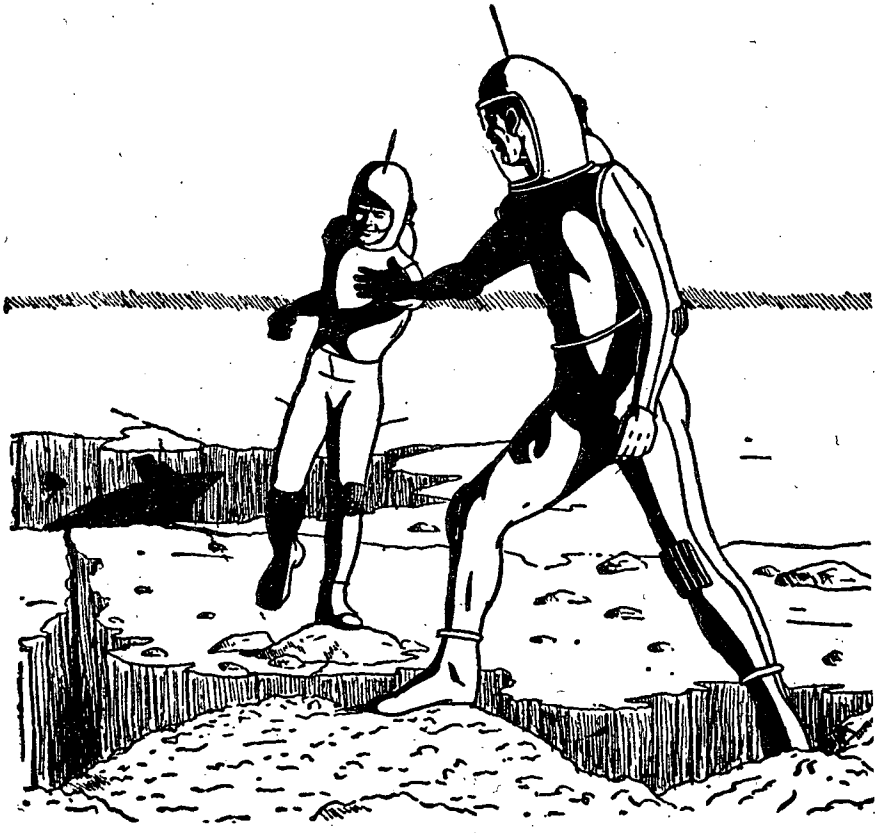
THE SURVIVORS

By T. D. HAMM

Step by gruelling step the four of them slogged their way toward a perilous safety. It was a magnificent display of the will for survival. The only question was, whose survival?



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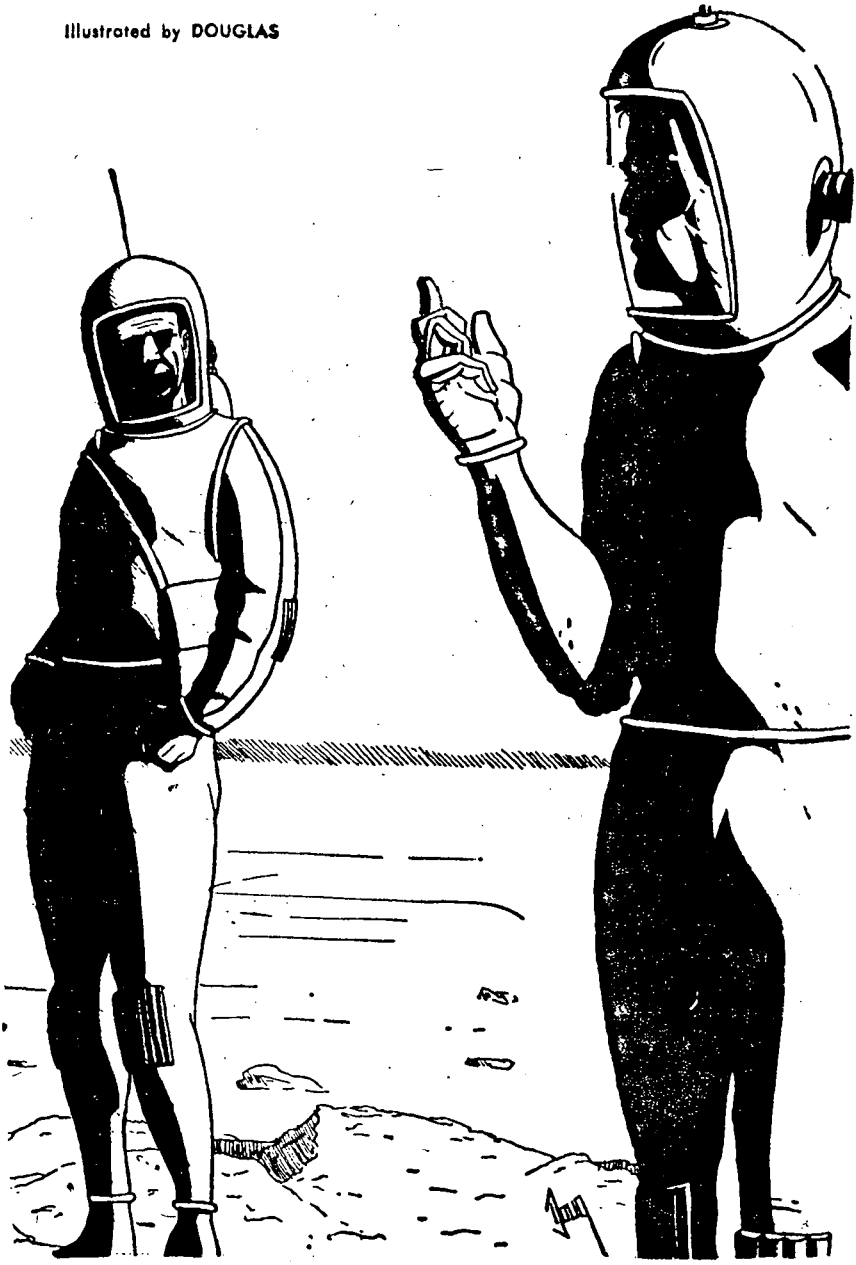
Illustrated by DOUGLAS



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THERE were only four of them now. Soames and Rutherford had literally gone down with the ship in a roar of cascading rock and sand. Out of fifty square miles of the Martian plateau they had been unlucky enough to sit down on the egg-shell thin roof of a sector honey-combed with caves. Scant moments after the exploring party had disembarked, Soames' comments on their resemblance to a Sunday School picnic were suddenly broken off by a cacophonous medley of yells, the rolling thunder of sliding rock, and over all the agonized metallic shrieking of tortured metal as the ship fell, crushed and twisted. There came a final tremendous roar as the fuel tanks blew. The ground heaved convulsively, and shuddered into silence.

Stunned and deafened, Bradford, Canham, Palmer and Rodriguez pulled themselves to their feet, staring dazedly at the towering column of dust hanging like a malevolent genie over the half-mile wide chasm.

Palmer, white with shock, lunged forward, turning indignantly as Bradford's arm jerked him back.

"Soames—and Rutherford—" he stuttered. "We've got to do something!"

Bradford's lip twisted mirthlessly.

"What're you going to do—jump in after them? If there was anything left of them the fuel tanks took care of it. They're gone—we're here. And we'd better start figuring out what we're going to do about it.

The four of them looked at each other silently. They knew as well as he, what they faced. Theirs had been the task of setting up a temporary exploring base till the supply ship arrived in three months—with luck.

Supplies for six months and all their equipment except their emergency rations had gone down with the ship. No hope there—as well explore the Grand Canyon with a teaspoon as to try to salvage anything under that million tons of rock. Compressed food they had, two weeks supply per man; their extra oxygen tanks; an extra battery apiece for the suit heaters. Water would be their worst problem.

Bradford looked at the miles of barren, reddish wasteland and shrugged fatalistically.

"If there's any water at all, it will be at the Polar cap. We might as well get going—we've got a long hike."

Palmer grimaced wryly. "Forward, you Eagle Scouts. We can get our merit badges easy."

"Yeah, we can get them from Santa Claus at the Pole—"Rodriguez made a valiant attempt at his usual sardonic humor.

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They piled a small cairn of the red rocks and Bradford planted the green and white flag of the Federated Nations. Encased in its protective covering he placed a note at its foot indicating their destination.

"We ought to sign it 'Kilroy,' Canham grunted as they trudged forward. "Say, how far do we have to walk?"

"Around a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles."

Their concerted whistle of dismay echoing oddly in their earphones, they set out in thoughtful silence across the red face of Mars, the hovering dust blotting out their footprints as they went.

Three days and seventy five miles later, they huddled wearily against the face of a small cliff shivering in the icy chill of the night wind. They had found a dessicated bush or two in a protected nook during the afternoon and carried it with them. Now, they fed the wiry twigs into the fire with miserly care glad of its meager light against the haunted dark.

Rodriguez held a branch to the firelight. "Looks like a sort of poorhouse cousin to birch," he hazarded. "Wonder if they ever had forests on this God-forgotten planet?"

Palmer grinned. "Well, at least there is still life of sorts. Rutherford would have flipped his lid over those comical little fellows we saw today."

A half dozen times they had seen furry little marsupials, downy as chinchillas, their young poking out inquisitive snouts toward the interlopers and as promptly getting them slapped down again.

A flicker of motion on the perimeter of firelight caught his eye. "We've got a visitor," he whispered. "There's one of the little beggars now."

He tossed a crumb from his plate toward the peering head. Flicking a tongue like a lizard's, the visitor fielded it neatly in midair and advanced, peering hopefully at the circle of grinning faces. Palmer stretched out a stealthy hand and gripped it gently about the middle as it sniffed at his food can.

"Look at him," he cried delightedly. "He doesn't even squirm. He likes me!"

He tickled its ears, sliding his fingers down through the heavy, silky pelt. "You could make a fortune with these . . ." he dropped it abruptly with an anguished yelp and a string of blistering oaths, while his friends clung to each other and howled mirthfully.

"Your little friend, he pulled a knife on you. No?" queried Rodriguez sympathetically. The grin faded from his suddenly startled face.

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"Amigo, que lo es? Hey, fellows—something's wrong!"

Palmer, his face shocked and dazed had dropped to his knees, whimpering and retching painfully.

"My God, look—his hand!" whispered Bradford.

They had removed their bulky gloves before eating and Palmer's exposed hand was black and swollen beyond recognition. Even as they watched, the skin split, leaking watery fluid. His body contorted, he rolled on the ground screaming with unbearable agony.

Bradford's hand dropped to his pistol and fell away again. He looked at the others pleadingly.

"We can't let him suffer this way. But my God—I *can't* do it. . . ."

Canham looked at him dully. "You won't have to—he's finished."

The rigidly contorted body relaxed inertly, the tortured eyes open and glazed. Rodriguez crossed himself and burst into childish sobs.

Bradford put out a restraining hand toward Canham.

"Let him alone—I wish to God I could do the same thing. Give me a hand with Palmer—we'll have to bury him the best way we can."

Shaken with more than the night chill, they removed the clumsy oxygen and water containers and piled a protective cairn of rocks above the silent figure. Behind them, Rodriguez sobbed bitter Spanish curses and hurled rocks at telltale flickers of movement in the dark.

Through the next day and the next, they trudged on doggedly, speaking little as they put the reluctant miles behind them, taking what shelter they could during the bitter nights. During the day under the thin Martian sunlight, they turned off the suit-heaters, conserving the batteries; hoarding their remaining food and water with miserly care.

Bradford, assuming tacitly acknowledged leadership, pondered the situation wearily. Even with Palmer's supplies, it was doubtful that the three of them could last out the ten weeks or so remaining before the arrival of the second ship. If they could only make it to the Pole—there they were sure of water at least, in the vegetation belt surrounding the shallow icecap. If it was ice and not frozen carbon dioxide which some of the experts held out for. In their initial swing around the planet they had seen the narrow green belt dotted with shining pools. Plants meant oxygen, too; and it was possible that in a temperature supporting some

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kind of growing life, it would be warm enough so that they could remove their helmets for breathing, if only in the brief daylight hours.

Bradford, lost in thought, started as Canham touched his arm, motioning him to open his faceplate and turn off the headphones.

"What's the matter with you?" he jerked impatiently.

Canham turned a thumb toward Rodriguez.

"Nothing's the matter with me. *Him*—I think he's going off his rocker."

Bradford looked at Rodriguez plodding unheedingly ahead. Since his first outburst after Palmer's death, he had gone mechanically about each day's routine, outwardly calm. He said little, but neither had the others. The only indication of his inner torment was when one of the deadly little marsupials peered at them as they went on their way. With deadly fury, he would hurl a barrage of rocks through the air, while the little animal eyed them in indifferent curiosity. Occasionally he scored a hit, laughing grimly as the dying animal erected the ruff of lethal spines through its silky fur.

Bradford snorted mirthlessly. "I doubt if either of us would pass a sanity test at the moment," he grunted. "What's so special about him?"

Canham's normally cheerful face retained its solemn worry.

"I know what you mean—but, watch him next time one of those dust-devils comes by."

The day before they had descended the northern slope of the high plateau onto the long, sandy plain that extended northward. Everywhere there were the dancing, careening dust-devils, tall columns of the brick-red sand; faintly menacing forms pursuing some unseen purpose of their own. From time to time, one would swerve close, seeming to keep pace with them for a few steps before whirling off in its erratic dance.

One approached them now. Rodriguez turned toward it making a furtive gesture with thumb and forefinger and deliberately trickled a stream from his water bottle upon the sand.

Bradford came forward on the run, shouting into the hastily adjusted helmet mike. Angrily he jerked the bottle out of Rodriguez' unresisting hand.

"What the hell do you think you're playing at?" Bradford panted.

Rodriguez eyed him sullenly.

"I know these things, as my people know them. Los *Bailerines del Diablo*—the devil dancers. One gives them what is most precious. *Es muy necessario.*" More and more he was losing his usually fluent, faintly accented

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English and reverting to his native tongue.

Bradford eyed him sternly. "Rodriguez, you are a good Catholic. You wear a holy medal. What's all this talk about sacrifices to the devil?"

Rodriguez' gaze slid away. "I don't think God knows about this place. This is of *El Diablo.*"

"So now you want to get in good with the Devil," Bradford grunted. "Well, you can do it some other way than with the last of the water." He jerked his head at Canham waiting wearily behind them.

"Come on, you two. We'll all feel better when we get out of this—desert." He ended with a wry twist of the lips. He had nearly said 'god-forsaken.' Maybe Rodriguez had the right idea after all.

During the afternoon, some chance convection of air currents sharply increased the dust whirls. The desert seemed full of their erratic, spinning shapes. Rodriguez plodded along, ignoring Canham's sporadic attempts at conversation. The chilly sunlight was waning and Bradford's face lighted with relief at the sight of a small sand hill. At least they could dig a hole to get their backs into and break the whistling winds. He felt an irrational comfort at the thought of the coming darkness —at least they wouldn't be able to see the dust-devils. Maybe they could get some talk going and snap Rodriguez out of his melancholy silence. Perhaps they had all been getting too introverted since the series of disasters.

They made camp before dark, digging themselves well in; Bradford and Canham forced themselves into a semblance of cheerfulness as they worked. Rodriguez's face remained dark and unsmiling. Like one of those damned stone images in the Yucatan jungle, Bradford thought with a brief burst of irritation. You wouldn't think that the little Mexican had been the ship's humorist, his face one perpetual white-toothed smile.

As they huddled cold and uncomfortable in the gathering darkness, Canham grinned apologetically and with the air of a conjuror producing trained seals from a hat, gravely presented three crushed and bent but undeniable cigarettes, distinctly contraband on the ship. He eyed Bradford with mock contrition.

"I can't imagine how I got these in my kit. I guess when I was packing everything just went black. Of course, if you'd care to be my companion in crime . . . ?"

Bradford frowned darkly. "I ought to have you in irons for this, Mr. Canham! Now give me

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one of those things before I break your arm!"

With a muttered word of thanks, Rodriguez laid his carefully aside on a handy rock and slid out of the shelter into the early dark. Canham tossed a facetious remark after him and received the usual unprintable reply.

The other two sat, inhaling luxuriously. Bradford sighed comfortably.

"I think he's snapping out of it. Good thing you noticed what was happening. We'll all have to keep an eye on each other from now on."

"It's enough to drive anybody nuts. Have you noticed anything funny about—well, about the *feel* of the place?"

Bradford looked at him uneasily.

"What do you mean 'funny'!"

"It's just a feeling I get; you know how a brand-new house that's never been lived in feels different than an old house that's been deserted? They're both empty, but it's a different emptiness. It's the same way with pieces of country—where we trained on that high desert country in Arizona, it had a new, sort of *unused* feeling about it."

Bradford felt an unacknowledged tingling along his nerve ends.

"Well, this is a lot like it—" he tossed out defensively. In spite of himself he slid a sidelong glance at the surrounding dark.

Canham went on unnoticing.

"That's what I mean—it's a lot *like* it, but it's different too. Like it had been lived in for God knows how long, but everybody moved out."

"But there's no ruins, or anything—"

"Maybe there wouldn't be any after a million years or so. And how do we know what's under the sand? You can't even find your own footprints fifteen minutes after you've made them."

Bradford laughed shortly. "Well, keep your spooky ideas to yourself. We don't want Rodriguez going clear off his rocker."

They sat watching the fading landscape where the dustdevils still swooped and swung. Finally, with a faint frown, Bradford glanced at his chronometer.

"Roddy's been gone quite a while," he said uneasily. He stood suddenly and lifted his voice sharply.

"Rodriguez! Hey, amigo—andale Ud.!" He glanced at Canham. "I don't like this—we don't know what we're liable to run onto in this damned country. . . ."

They set out, trotting clumsily in their heavy suits, circling the mound where Rodriguez

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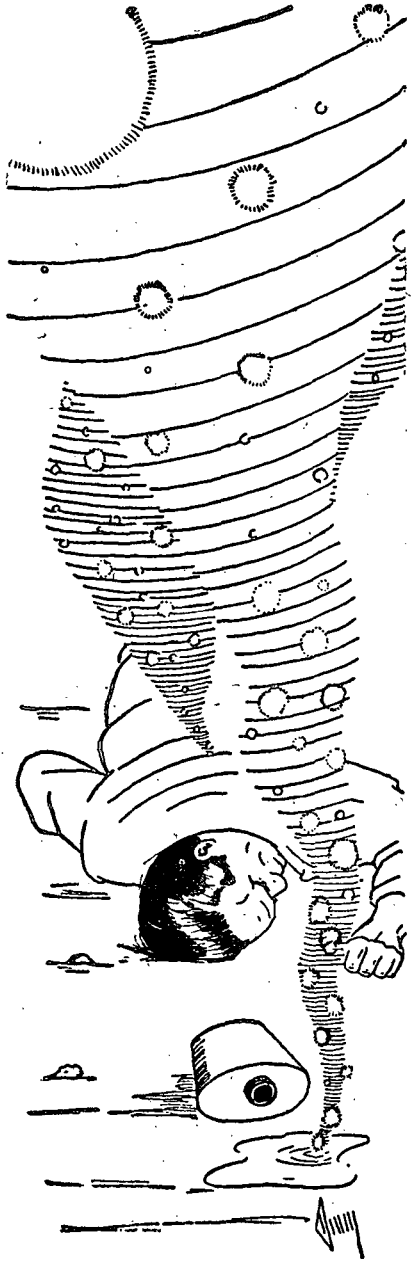

footprints were already fading in the shifting sands. Canham gave a sudden convulsive clutch at his companion's arm. There was no need to speak—scattered over the sand were the component parts of a space-suit; the heavy gloves, the helmet, the shoes. And neatly wrapped in the padded coverall the oxygen tanks. Ahead, nearly invisible, were the prints of naked feet.

Bradford groaned. "Good God, he's gone completely nuts. He'll be frozen stiff in ten minutes!"

They saw the crumpled heap at the same moment and with a thrill of undefinable terror they saw the stooping, whirling shadow, spinning dizzily over the huddled shape.

Bradford wrenched his faceplate open, yelling frantically. Gasping, he slammed the mask shut against something like a rain of fiery sparks on his unprotected skin. It was all too evident that Rodriguez would never hear again.

Gathering his strength to turn the inert figure, he nearly overbalanced—there was no weight to it at all! Beside him, Canham cried out hoarsely, "My God—he's like a mummy—!"

The whole figure looked strangely unhuman. Completely dehydrated, the flesh molded tight over the protruding bones, Rodriguez lay peacefully, both

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stick-like hands clasped over the holy medal on his chest.

Sick and shaken, they bent to the task of scooping sand over the shrunken body, glancing sidelong at the devil-dancers whirling exultantly in the shadowy night.

Bradford with a defiant look at his companion, unhooked Rodriguez' half-empty water bottle from his own belt and placed it upright at the head of the mound.

"He knew what they wanted and I took it away from him. I guess we can spare him this!"

Retrieving the oxygen tank and the heat batteries as they went, they trudged wearily back to their meager shelter, sickeningly conscious of the vacant space beside them.

Canham gave a sudden choked exclamation.

"He didn't even get to smoke his cigarette—"

Bradford caught his upthrown arm. "He left it for us. When things get tough we'll share it."

Canham gave an hysterical giggle. "When 'things get tough' —! Goodnight, Hardrock!"

The two days following went by in a continuous waking nightmare—putting one foot in front of the other foot, inching their way monotonously toward the still invisible Pole. They had left the dust-devils behind—due to some freakishness of the wind, so they figured.

Canham looks like Death on a pale horse, Bradford thought dully. And I probably look worse. He rubbed absently at the dry, scaly pits on his face where the unholy dust had stung him and reverted to his private worry. Suppose the carefully theorized solar compass was wrong? Suppose this double-damned planet possessed a field of its own that would throw their calculations out and they were going in circles? If they were heading North, the Pole couldn't be more than another day or two distant even if his reckoning had been off.

Unconsciously he lengthened his stride for a few paces, and was reminded by his quickened breathing that he was wasting his scant oxygen supply. They already had tapped their original spare tanks, thankful for the lessened weight as they jettisoned the empty. Even with Palmer and Rodriguez' partly filled tanks they only had enough for a couple of days full time use. Since they had left the region of the whirlwinds, they had been able to experiment cautiously with leaving their faceplates open a few minutes at a time, even though the thin, oxygen-starved air caused their lungs to labor painfully.

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Bradford was roused from his musings by an astonished exclamation from his companion. Down on his knees, Canham was babbling incoherently, "—green! It's green!"

Bradford knelt beside him in awestruck silence. A tiny growth scarcely large enough to be dignified with the title of shrub, here in this arid plain and undeniably—green! Canham touched it caressingly.

"Baby, I hope all your brothers and sister and the rest of the kinfolk are just over the hill!"

Clambering to their feet, they set off, lumbering awkwardly in their heavy suits, breath coming in labored gasps to halt abruptly at the edge of a steep downward slope. Before them lay another belt of arid sand and beyond a ring of marshy, pool-dotted soil encircling a solid belt of vivid green—and faintly visible on the horizon, the glimmer of the shallow snowcap.

Canham gulped audibly. "If Cortez really wanted a thrill, he should have discovered this overgrown duckpond. The Pacific—phooey!"

Bradford slapped him on the back. "I feel like I could flap my wings and fly down! Last one in's a rotten egg. . . ."

Laughing with almost hysterical relief, they ran, waddled and slid, needless of bumps and oxygen wastage. They picked themselves up at the bottom, grinning sheepishly.

"If Space Authority could only see us now!" Canham chortled. "Let us now with due dignity take possession of our kingdom."

Jubilantly they strode ahead, bowing to imaginary cheering crowds.

"We've got it made, Hardrock. We got it made!"

Bradford's grin wavered. "Well . . . we've got it made this far anyway, with two months and half to go. Let's hope there's duck on that pond!"

Suddenly sobered they went on; before them the semi-arid belt seemed to stretch interminably toward the barely visible green area. The horizon seemed to retreat as they advanced.

"Another night in this damned desert," Bradford groaned. "At least we may be able to get a fire going with this brush—and a real swallow of water apiece. I hope that stuff we saw out there wasn't a mirage," he added disconsolately.

"Not that—that was real honest-to-God water. Wish I'd brought my duck gun. These damn supply sergeants never do send out the right equipment."

Towards dusk they scooped out a shallow hole in the sand and roofed it with green branches.

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"With our luck this stuff will probably turn out to be poison ivy," Canham predicted gloomily. "Join me in my thatched hut, oh beauteous one—and look out for sandburrs."

They slept fitfully, shivering through the long night hours. Bradford announced that this was undoubtedly the North Pole and they had arrived at the beginning of the six months night. With the first of the thin, cheerless rays of the distant sun, they clambered out of their cramped sleeping place, some of yesterday's enthusiasm waning as they stumbled about, relaxing stiffened muscles.

Vaguely uneasy and depressed they started out; the very nearness of their goal somehow seemed to make their chances of reaching it doubly unsure.

Afternoon brought them to the edge of the marshy area; they halted, surveying it doubtfully. Any such region on Earth would have been busy with life—frogs croaking on lily pads, water rats and fish making small plopping sounds in the water, tall reeds swaying. Here there was nothing that breathed of warm-blooded life. Only the shallow pools lying stagnant, reflecting stubby water-grasses, dotted here and there with small mounds growing a stunted bush or two.

Canham shivered suddenly. "This is more dead than a cypress swamp. How I'd love to see a little old cottonmouth rearing his ugly head out of that puddle."

Bradford shifted his shoulders uneasily.

"Well, here goes! Shall we circle around a bit to see if there's a dryer path?"

An hour's walking brought no change; always before them lay the silent marsh, inimical in its unending desolation. And beyond it, tantalizingly green, lay the only growing things on Mars.

With some difficulty they managed to find a branch apiece long enough for a probing pole and started out reluctantly, wincing as their feet sank deep in the fetid ooze.

"These boots are damned heavy," Bradford remarked doubtfully.

"You take yours off if you want to," Canham returned emphatically. "I'm damned if I'm going to step on some slimy, poisonous species of fauna in my bare feet."

They forged ahead doggedly, tapping with their poles, making for a stunted shrub lifting itself above the rest. Bradford, slightly in the lead, whirled as Canham gave a stifled yelp and hauled himself up on the mound, looking slightly green.

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"Felt like a whale turned under my foot," he panted. "Let's get out of this so I can be sick—"

Foot by foot, they heaved and plunged their way through the relentless sucking mire.

"We must be nearly to the other side," Bradford wheezed. "We've got to make it before dark. It's a cinch we can't camp here."

Canham looked across the few hundred yards remaining and shook his head wearily.

"This thing is like a moat; I get the feeling that we're being kept out by one defense after another. Those harmless looking, poisonous little beasts that killed Palmer, the wind-devils that got Rodriguez and now—this."

Bradford repressed a shiver.

"Come on!" he said roughly. "Don't start telling your ghost stories here, for the love of heaven! Save them for your kids."

They plopped off the further side of the mound, their feet making gobbling noises as they lifted them one after the other in the tenacious, clinging mud. Bradford halted suddenly.

"There it is," he breathed. "You can see the shore from here. . . ."

Caution forgotten, they plunged ahead, panting with effort. Canham gave a sudden startled cry.

"Brad! I can't—lift—my foot . . . ! I can't move it!"

Bradford, a few steps to the right, felt his heart leap sickeningly at the stark terror in the voice.

"Take it easy! Get a grip on my pole—*now!*"

He heaved strongly, feet slipping, unable to get a purchase to make his strength felt against the pull of the quicksand. The perspiration trickled into his smarting eyes. Through Canham's faceplate, he could see his face set in agonized strain as he attempted to free his feet in their heavy boots, the water level rising from waist to armpits as he struggled. Bradford redoubled his efforts, muscles cracking as he tried to heave the other free bodily. Canham relaxed suddenly.

"It's no use," he panted heavily. "Don't come closer—it'll just get both of us. Don't stay and watch it—it'll just make it harder. Wait a minute—here, catch!"

With a last convulsive effort, he jerked loose the oxygen tank and gave it a desperate throw. Bradford automatically caught it, nearly going off-balance and righting himself with panic-stricken effort.

"Hold on! hold on—" he gritted. "I'll get some branches from that shrub; you can throw yourself forward so I can get a grip on you."

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Canham looked at him palely.

"No use. But, I'm not going under with my helmet on, still alive, under—*this!*"

He shuddered queasily, and with one quick jerk freed his faceplate as he went under. For a moment the water boiled furiously as the remaining oxygen in his suit released. Then Bradford stood alone, staring stupidly with shock, watching as the bubbles rose more and more slowly and died away.

He had no recollection of floundering the remaining hundred yards to the shore. Physically sick and shaking with horror, he ploughed through the shallowing ooze and fell headlong on wet, but solid earth.

The sun was sinking as he finally stirred, groaning, and pulled himself further away from the haunted ooze. Incredibly, he slept at last, waking to the first rays of the sun, dazed and unbelieving. Turning instinctively for the reassurance of another face, remembrance hit him like a blow. Bile came up into his mouth as he wrenched his faceplate open and was grindingly, shudderingly sick.

The spasm over, he heaved himself to his feet, staring about stupidly. Surely there was something he had to do? Every morning for so long he had had to lift himself to his feet and force himself to go on till dark—toward the Pole.

But—here *was* the green and a few miles away the hoarfrost glitter of the snowcap. There was nowhere to go!

"We made it—" he said uncertainly, looking around. But there was no one to share the triumph. Dully, he thought of them all—Palmer, betrayed by a gentle, kittenlike thing—Rodriguez, a human sacrifice to something utterly alien—Canham, dead on the edge of victory. He looked at Canham's oxygen canister and laid his hand on it gently. Then slowly, with dragging steps, he went on toward the shining green that had cost them so much to achieve.

The ground and the air above it as he approached were strangely warm. And the plants too, were warm and oddly different. No biologist, he dimly sensed a difference from any growth that Earth knew. The stems, the leaves were veined with pulsing red and at the tip of each stem, a flower lifted, shaped like an open mouth. There was a space between each plant, none crowded his neighbor. It was very orderly and pleasant and so warm—so warm. He opened his faceplate.

Drowsy and relaxed, no longer driven by unrelenting urgency, he found himself nodding dreamily as he walked between the tall

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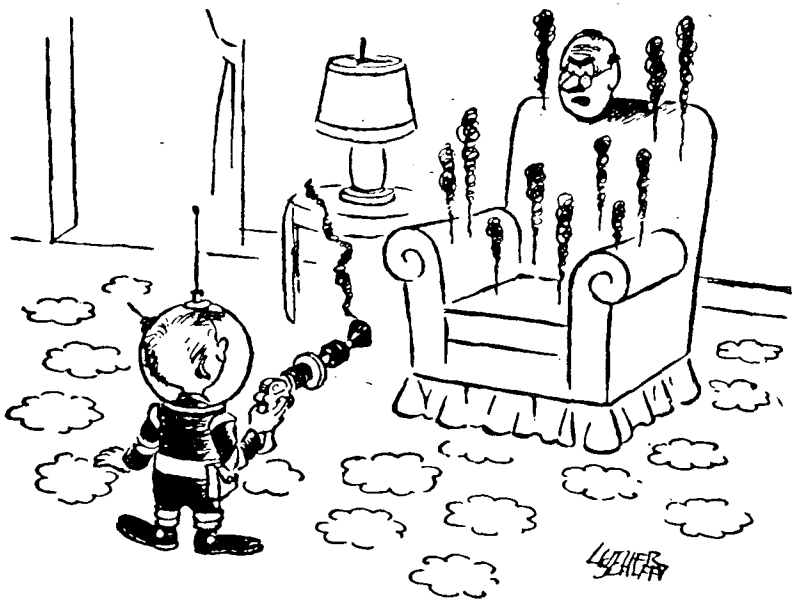
stems. With a sigh of pleasure, he laid down among them, conscious on the verge of sleep of an insistent demanding whisper —"More air! Give us air!" Unhesitatingly, he opened the gauge of the oxygen tank, drifting into a sea of darkness.

The red-veined plants about him pulsed with a quicker rhythm as the thousand opened mouths drank in the air, rich with a richness they had not known for a million years. And about the unconscious form of the man, poured the carbon dioxide from the lips of a thousand oxygen breathing creatures.

They had had a million years to learn the technique of survival as the atmosphere of their planet drained off into space. Retreating, adapting, eon by eon to their last stronghold; ringed round by their guardians of the Earth, the Air and the Water.

Here were the Survivors.

THE END



"Junior, we don't point even toy guns at people—"

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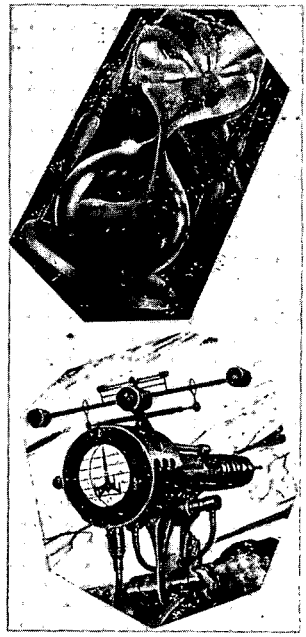
THE MOST THRILLING

SCIENCE FICTION

EVER TOLD



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JAMES BLISH	AND SOME WERE SAVAGES
J. F. BONE	THE MISSIONARY
A. BERTRAM CHANDLER	SEEING EYE
THEODORE L. THOMAS	THE SOUND OF SCREAMIN
JOHN JAKES	THE HIGHEST FORM OF LIFI
T. D. HAMM	THE SURVIVORS

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